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Sensing salvation: accounts of spiritual experience in early British Methodism, 1735-1765

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SENSING SALVATION: ACCOUNTS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IN EARLY BRITISH METHODISM, 1735-1765

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Oraleen Urban,
who first inspired my love of research

and to Pierre,
who ran alongside cheering.

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It is a humbling task to consider the number of people who contribute to the making of a dissertation. I am grateful to the staff of the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester for their support during my research trips. Peter Nockles deserves special mention for his help and encouragement over the past twelve or so years that I have been acquainted with him. Thanks are also due to the following persons for their hospitality and welcome: Chris Hartley from the Methodist International House in Manchester; the staff at the Nazarene Theological College in Didsbury; John and Isobel MacFarlane, and Gail McCoy-Parkhill, for their comfortable accommodation and pleasant conversation during my time in Oxford. I am especially grateful to John Walsh and Henry Rack for their invitations to tea and for offering invaluable research material from their private collections. Bill Gibson and Peter Forsaith from the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History were generous with their time and expertise, directing me to people and resources that proved most useful.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the spiritual experiences of the first British Methodist lay people and the language used to describe those experiences. Within the historiography of Methodism, such physical manifestations as shouting, weeping, groaning, visions, and out-of-body experiences have often been relegated to the periphery of scholarship. It would seem, however, that for many laity, they played a significant role in their process of spiritual development. This work aims to explore the perspective of Methodist laity through manuscript accounts of conversions and deathbed moments. It reveals lay people's first impressions of Methodism, their conflicted feelings throughout the conversion process, their approach toward death and dying, and their mixed attitudes toward the task of writing itself. Relying heavily on firsthand accounts solicited by Charles Wesley in the 1740s, this work features the voices of women and men of varying literate abilities and social status.

This study examines firstly the multiple media through which lay people received evangelical messages, expanding the term "media" to include not only traditional printed sources such as sermons and devotional reading, but also such phenomena as divine voices, visions and other direct supernatural encounters. It then turns to the task of

expressing spiritual experience, revealing the problematic nature of early Methodist spiritual autobiography and the passive strategies employed by laity to legitimate writing about the self. This dissertation demonstrates the struggle to rely on unreliable "feelings" (both emotions and physical sensations) as an indicator of spiritual progress. Far from peripheral, the body and bodily language played important roles in spiritual transformation, even as they were constantly renegotiated as part of that transformation. For instance, the visualization of the "vile self" signified the activation of the "eye of faith," which enabled many early writers to transition from a "worldly" conception of self-sufficiency to a new kind of subjectivity based on being subject to a divine authority. This study follows the trajectory of spiritual development into the final moments of life, which often proved a prime opportunity for mutual evangelization between the dying individual and her spectators. Taken together, these experiences offer an intimate perspective on the origins of the evangelical revival.

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All illustrations are taken from an untitled manuscript by Samuel Roberts, a disenchanted Methodist. The manuscript is privately owned by Dr. John Walsh of Jesus College, Oxford University and has been used with permission.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CM ..... Conference Minutes

CWJ..... The Manuscript Journals of Charles Wesley

CWS..... The Sermons of Charles Wesley

DDCW ..... Charles Wesley Papers

DDPr ..... Early Preachers Collection

DDSe..... William Seward Letter Book

EMV..... Early Methodist Volumes

JWW…….. The Works of John Wesley (Bicentennial Edition)

MARC..... Methodist Archives and Research Centre (Manchester)

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the spiritual experiences of the first Methodist lay people and the language used to describe those experiences.[1] It is no secret that shouting, weeping, groaning, visions, and convulsive fits were common manifestations of early Methodist religious experience. Although solid organization, a pragmatic theology and the Wesley brothers' vast literary output certainly contributed to the growth of the Methodist movement, many adherents were initially attracted by the more sensual elements of Methodist life. Lively hymn singing, preaching, prayers and testimonies evoked feelings ranging from agonizing guilt and remorse to intense joy and ecstasy. These religious experiences did not always reside solely within the realm of emotion—they were also expressed through physical manifestations.

During conversion experiences and other godly encounters, Methodists were compelled to cry out, fall to the ground, or weep with abandon. Some spoke of the physical sensation of "sinking."[2] Others experienced vivid dreams and visions. Still others felt their hearts "melted" like wax while they "groaned for redemption." In other words, Methodists both received and transmitted religious messages through the senses. They also utilized the language of sensory perception in describing their religious experiences—seeing God in visions, hearing God's voice, feeling God's touch. When

[1] The term "layperson" refers technically to non-ordained participants in the Methodist movement. Within the movement, however, lay people were frequently recruited as teachers, preachers and exhorters, and so the non-ordained status does not necessarily exclude positions of leadership. While the majority of narratives examined were written by ordinary participants, some were indeed lay preachers, class leaders, etc.

[2] "It seemed to me I sunk down before him as if I were sweetly melting into nothing," Mary Fletcher's *Journal*, 1763, as quoted in Paul Chilcote, *Early Methodist Spirituality: Selected Women's Writings* (Nashville: Kingswood, 2007), 241.

Methodists felt themselves convicted of sin, justified by faith, or assured of salvation, they enacted these spiritual stages through gestures, songs and other utterances.

Within the historiography of Methodism, these kinds of religious experiences have often been relegated to the periphery of scholarship. When such manifestations are mentioned, they are treated as quaint or mildly embarrassing behaviors of illiterate, unenlightened working-class folk, rather than significant experiences that formed the core of ordinary Methodist spirituality.[3] For instance, Methodist scholar J. Ernest Rattenbury laments the weaknesses of "emotionalism, subjectivity" and "unhealthy introspection" that he identifies in within the early Methodist revival. He claims that in contrast to the Wesley brothers, who "kept their sense of perspective" and "did not lose their balance," certain lay people who caught the "testimony habit" became more interested in themselves than in the God whom they professed to worship. He posits that had more people remained faithful to the Wesleyan ideal, "many tragedies of subjectivity, both of emotional sentimentalism, and of introspective despair… would have been prevented."[4]

In a similar though less pejorative manner, historian Frederick Norwood references "some of the cruder expressions of excessive emotionalism, such as the 'jerks' and other physical manifestations" in his history of early American Methodism. He completely sidesteps, however, the ways in which such manifestations were interpreted, suggesting merely that they were linked to the "loneliness and isolation characteristic of

[3] Harold Nicolson similarly attempts to distance John Wesley from such emotional outbreaks, claiming that he "discouraged all exhibitions of hysteria or 'enthusiasm'… [leaving] the more emotional aspects of his revivalism to Whitefield and his brother Charles." See *The Age of Reason: 1700-1789* (Mount Jackson, Axios, 1960), 448.
[4] J. Ernest Rattenbury, *Vital Elements of Public Worship* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 87-89.

frontier life."[5] Even broader studies of evangelicalism tend to skirt the experiential aspects of spirituality, preferring to focus on theological and doctrinal issues. In his classic study of British evangelicalism, historian D. W. Bebbington briefly mentions instances of "increasing supernaturalism," such as prophecies, speaking in tongues, divine healings and other "proto-Pentecostal happenings," though he simply states that they took place rather than examining their significance within evangelical community.[6]

A number of others studies have attempted to psychologize the experiences of early Methodists, interpreting their emotional states in terms of modern medicine and psychiatric practice.[7] I am not convinced, however, that this ought to be the most significant priority for the historian. If Methodist lay people are the subject of investigation, it follows that the historian will attempt to enter into the historical context and perspective of these people. This endeavor does not come at the expense of objectivity; however, a study that does not aim to re-present the interpretation of the historical subjects themselves can only ever be flawed and incomplete. For this reason, it is less interesting for me to define supernatural phenomena according to twenty-first-century medical standards than it is for me to investigate the ways in which Methodists themselves interpreted what was happening to them. Thus, I refrain from passing judgment concerning what may or may not have been a "real" experience—whether or not someone "really" heard a voice, for instance. Instead, I ask simply what the voice said and how the individual interpreted and responded to it. Trying to attribute visions

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[5] Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 158-59.
[6] D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 91.
[7] See, for example, Keith Haartman, *Watching and Praying: Personality Transformation in Eighteenth Century British Methodism* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004).

and voices to particular psychological traumas perhaps satisfies a personal curiosity, but it does not necessarily permit a greater understanding of the eighteenth-century mind.

The intention of this work is less to diagnose than to describe and analyze. It aims to explore the perspective of early Methodist lay people, and as such aims to treat the experiences they relate with seriousness and objectivity. How did they speak of supernatural encounters? What significance did they give to bodily manifestations? In what ways was the body thought to reveal or impede the work of the divine? In this study which features autobiographical narratives and other firsthand manuscripts, "ordinary" lay people recount their first impressions of Methodism, their conflicted feelings throughout the conversion process, their approach toward death and dying, and their mixed attitudes toward the task of writing itself.

Sources

The most significant source for this study is a collection of spiritual accounts solicited by Charles Wesley. While there is not as yet concrete evidence for Charles's motivations in requesting these accounts, it seems likely that he wished to gather evidence of the success of the Methodist movement (or perhaps his own personal ministry), as well as to add to the corpus of Methodist devotional literature. Methodist leaders did not systematically require written accounts from their members, and so these autobiographical sources offer a rare glimpse into the perspective of early laity. The bulk of these accounts were written in the early 1740s during the movement's first growth spurt, though a few accounts bear later dates. Most narratives were written by laity in the areas of Bristol and London. These accounts have been catalogued as "Early Methodist

Volumes" and are housed at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester. This collection includes primarily conversion narratives and deathbed accounts, as well as other miscellaneous correspondence. This collection is particularly important for several reasons.

First, these accounts were never edited for publication and are therefore preserved in their original state. Second, the narratives evince a particularly close relationship with Charles Wesley, as opposed to his brother John. Third, the collection contains an exceptionally high ratio of female to male authorship, roughly 3:1. Fourth, these early writers were drawn from varying literate abilities and social status. While some appear to have been well-educated, others seem to have had difficulty simply holding the pen. The surface presentation of the narratives thus ranges from highly-articulate and polished manuscripts to barely-legible letters sprinkled with ink blobs. As the handwriting and orthography reveal much about the life and character of the writers, the original spelling has been retained throughout this study. Fifth, most of these accounts—both conversion narratives and deathbed moments—were written in the immediate wake of those experiences. As such, they reveal a freshness and authenticity distinct from the polished reflections of a carefully crafted memoir.

All of these characteristics distinguish the early accounts from those later solicited by John Wesley for publication in the *Arminian Magazine* beginning in 1778.[8] Many published accounts feature preachers and other exemplary Methodists, with a 3:2 male to

[8] John Wesley published the *Arminian Magazine* from 1778 to 1797 as a response to the Calvinist publications *The Spiritual Magazine* and *The Gospel Magazine*. In order to counter Calvinistic theology, he solicited spiritual accounts and deathbed narratives (among other material) from his preachers and society members.

female ratio. As these narratives date approximately forty years later than those in the Early Methodist Volumes, they no longer reflect the beginning phase of the movement. By and large, these later authors had already heard of Methodism and Methodists long before they became Methodists themselves, and so were already somewhat aware of evangelical concerns by reputation and observation. All of the accounts in the *Arminian Magazine* passed through the editorial hand of John Wesley, and therefore reflect largely his ideals of what stories would be most useful and expedient for the good of the movement. For instance, Andrew Winckles notes that within the *Arminian Magazine*, the narratives about women portray them as "chaste and upright women," highlighting their roles are wife and mother.[9] This is not at all the case in the accounts written by women themselves. In the Early Methodist Volumes, for instance, women rarely reference their families or domestic lives, except as they specifically contribute to the narration of one's spiritual condition and progress. John Wesley's priorities are also evident in his "flattening" of narratives to conform with his own conversion experience which took place at Aldersgate in 1738. As a result, the edited narratives evoke a "fixed identity" as opposed to a "fluid sense of self."[10] This said, selected *Arminian Magazine* accounts remain useful as supplementary material, and they are employed occasionally as they relate to the specified subjects and timeframe examined in this work.

In general, the accounts found in the Early Methodist Volumes are favored for the raw and intense quality of their writing and because they evoke "the experience of… the

[9] Andrew O. Winckles, "'Excuse what difficiencies you will find:' Methodist Women and Public Space in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 3 (Spring 2013), 418.
[10] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'My Chains Fell Off, My Heart Was Free': Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England," *Church History* 68, no. 4 (December 1999), 918.

Evangelical Revival before it gets tidied up, placed in due order, and fixed in memory and text."[11] While the patterns of spiritual experiences are not unique in themselves, the attempt to rely on feelings and the pervasive presence of "flux and chaos," "divine and diabolical locutions and visions" render these accounts a particularly remarkable source for the study of eighteenth-century evangelicalism.[12] Scholars often lament the inaccessibility of such firsthand sources. For instance, in her study on preaching in eighteenth-century London, Jennifer Farooq remarks on the scarcity of responses to preaching, "as conversations about sermons were hardly ever recorded." The historian is typically "left with scattered remarks on sermons in diaries, commonplace books, letters and newspapers that represent the views of only a few, mostly exceptional, hearers." She observes that most responses were fairly vague, employing such adjectives as "good," "excellent" and "suitable."[13] The early Methodist narratives, however, are filled with detailed descriptions of responses to preaching, including texts read, hymns sung, and the hearers own thoughts and feelings upon hearing particular words and phrases. According to historian Henry Rack, these narratives offer "our best hope of understanding the mind of the early converts," affording a privileged glimpse into the "world of the newly or barely literate; on the culture of the self-educated, serious-minded artisan; and, not least,

[11] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157.
[12] Henry D. Rack, "Early Methodist Experience: Some Proto-Typical Accounts," *Religious Experience Research Centre Second Series Occasional Papers* 4, (1997), 3 and Hindmarsh, "'My Chains Fell Off," 919-20.
[13] Jennifer Farooq, *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 111-12.

on the more mysterious world of women in the lower reaches of eighteenth-century society."[14]

Limits of the study

As this study examines how spiritual practices were lived and interpreted by Methodist lay people, it is not specifically concerned with constructing "official" Methodist doctrine or theology except as it is expressed or discussed by lay people themselves. For instance, early lay writers almost never use such terminology as "prevenient grace," though they may retrospectively identify God's hand working in their lives before they were conscious of it.[15] Similarly, they did not always use fixed terms to categorize their spiritual progress. While "justification" was somewhat common, more often than not early writers simply described what they felt, perhaps noting that they had finally received the joy or assurance that they had been seeking. This tendency, coupled with frequent doubts about what had actually happened to them, makes it difficult to classify these experiences according to theological language traditionally used by Methodist scholars.

It should also be noted that these sources do not tend to reveal much detail concerning the structure of Methodist meetings. Very few individuals mention having attended a love feast, for example. Other types of gatherings (class and band meetings, etc.) are only noted if they precipitated a spiritual experience or have other specific

[14] Henry Rack, "Early Methodist Experience," 12.
[15] According to the theology of John Wesley, prevenient grace is a working of the Holy Spirit that precedes one's consciousness of it.

relevance to the narrative. While some describe particular moving moments while receiving communion, this particular genre of experience is more common in later decades of the eighteenth century. What is recounted in great detail is rather the preaching event and the writers' responses to particular sermons and texts, especially those preached by Charles Wesley. Accordingly, much of the spiritual vocabulary employed by these early lay people has been adopted from Charles's most popular sermons.

This study does not provide a comprehensive examination of gender differences gleaned from the narratives. Such analyses have already been provided by scholars such as Phyllis Mack and Andrew Winckles.[16] As far as can be determined by this scholar, the primary difference seems to lie in what men and women considered to be sinful in their pre-conversion life (reading plays and cherishing reputations for women, adultery and drinking for men). This is perhaps not too surprising, considering that there were different expectations for polite behaviors of women and men, and different levels of exposure to worldly vices and temptations. By and large, however, both women and men use the same spiritual vocabulary, the same metaphors to describe their spiritual conditions, and manifest the same type and degree of ecstasy and despair. Where some tendencies may be ventured, there are always exceptions.

For instance, dying women appear to struggle more with giving up their families. This may be due, however, to the fact that they were more insistently questioned on this

[16] Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 and Andrew O. Winckles, "Drawn out in Love: Religious Experience, the Public Sphere, and Evangelical Lay Women's Writing in Eighteenth Century England" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 2013).

subject than men were. One might then examine the gender of those posing the question, which is not always possible. Men also reveal deep sorrow and reluctance to let go of a spouse, though this is difficult to quantify as there were disproportionately more women than men participating in the Methodist movement. Many factors must be considered if attempting a gender analysis—the gender of the subject, the gender of the author (if not an autobiographical narrative) and the percentage of narratives written by and about each gender.

Time period

The established dates for this study are intended to highlight the beginnings of the Methodist movement, before it "mellow[ed] into a more familiar sociability."[17] The time frame also represents a period when Charles Wesley was especially active in the lives of the Methodist societies, assuming an itinerant ministry while exercising special care for the communities in London and Bristol.[18] A third motivation behind these particular dates is to exclude particular narrative sources that lie outside the scope of this project and/or that have already been largely treated elsewhere (for example, the aforementioned *Arminian Magazine*). The upper limit is somewhat flexible, however, and later sources have been used occasionally when deemed especially relevant.

Structure

This project was originally conceived as a study of early Methodism through the five physical senses. The initial schema soon proved inadequate, as the narratives

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[17] Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief and the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 216.
[18] Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33, 131.

revealed a strong preference for sight, sound and touch to the almost-total exclusion of smell and taste. The structure was then adapted to examine the physical aspects of spirituality according to the types of experiences recounted in the narratives—namely conversion, death and indeed the act of writing itself.

Chapter One addresses early Methodist media—the multiple channels through which lay people received evangelical messages. In addition to traditional sources such as sermons, hymns and other printed literature and correspondence, such media as divine voices and visions are also included, as many early Methodists claim to have had direct supernatural encounters. Chapter Two turns to individual expression of spiritual experience—both written and oral. Many individuals struggled between the impulse to share and tell, and the uncomfortable suspicion that to do so was somehow improper or wrong. The chapter explores possible origins of this tension and strategies by which Methodists tried to overcome it. Chapter Three examines visual experience and the language of sight as employed in conversion narratives. In addition to using the vocabulary of blindness and seeing, dark and light, many early writers also received special visions at certain points throughout the conversion process. The chapter looks at the specific function of these visions as interpreted by Methodist lay people. Chapter Four turns to the remaining physical manifestations that sometimes occurred during conversion—fits, convulsions, spontaneous weeping, out-of-body experiences, and the like. Though early Methodists were told that they ought to "feel" their sins forgiven, feelings (both sentiments and physical sensations) were not always easy to interpret. This chapter investigates how Methodists made sense of physical experiences in relation to

their spiritual progress. Chapter Five explores early Methodist traditions of death and dying. In addition to traditional deathbed narratives, accounts of condemned prisoners awaiting execution are also included. Faced with the urgency of an impending death, dying persons and their spectators looked for signs of a sound conversion. In cases where the dying person had not yet been converted, measures were taken to ensure that spiritual transformation happened in a timely manner. This chapter examines early Methodist attitudes toward death and dying, calling attention to elements of both the "good death" and the "bad death."

This work sometimes employs the creation of a fictional "average early Methodist," while at other times it highlights the particularities of individual experience. This tension ironically mirrors a tension inherent within evangelicalism, which at once promotes the notion that Christ died specifically "for me" while simultaneously fostering a strong sense of belonging, connectedness and community life.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY METHODIST MEDIA

"It was a splendid sermon and I could have listened to it forever,
and it made me feel utterly wretched."[19]

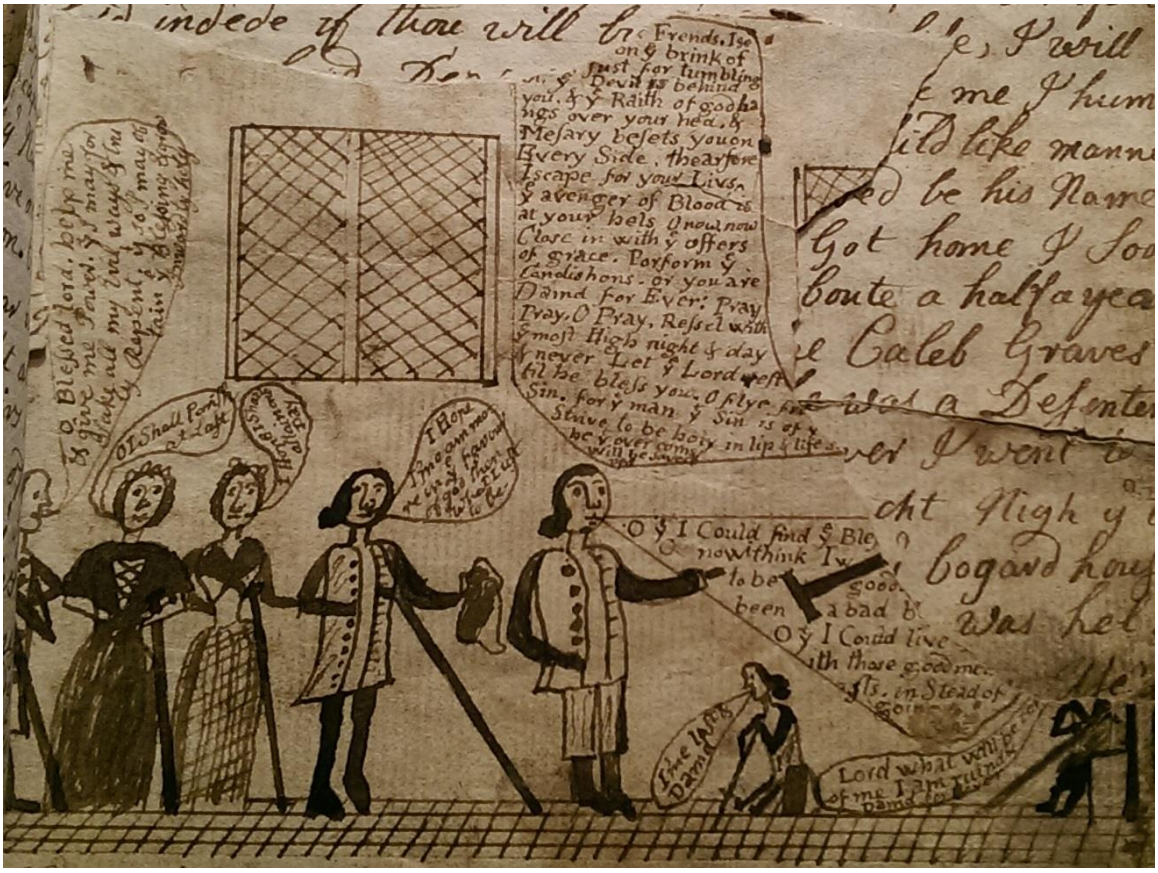

Figure 1. Methodists under convictions

Counterclockwise from left:

Man: "O Blessed Lord, help me & give me Power yt I may forsake all my Evil ways & [?] Repent, yt so I may obtain ye Blessing & inwardly holy."

Woman: "O I Shall Perish at Last."

Woman: "I Hope I Shall attain one Day."

[19] L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* (New York: Bantam Books, 1915), 158.

Man: "I Hope I… am more in ye favour of god then what I ust to Be."

Man: text half lost due to torn page.

Man on the floor: "I'me lost & Damd."

Man seated: "Lord what will be[come] of me, I am ruind & Damd forever."

Preacher: "…Frends, I se… on & brink of… just for tumbling… & ye Raith of god hangs over your hed, & Mesary besets you on every Side. thearfore Iscape for your Livs. Ye avenger of Blood is at your hels. O now, now Close in with ye offers of grace. Porform ye Condishons or you are Damd for Ever: Pray, Pray, O Pray. Ressel with ye most High night & day & never Let ye Lord rest til he bless you. O flye fr[om] Sin. For ye man yt Sin is of [?]. Strive to be holy in lip & life & he yt over come will be saved."

Introduction

This chapter examines the multimedia dialogue of Methodist conversion. What messages did Methodists receive, in what manner were these messages communicated, and how did Methodists respond in turn? The writings of the first Methodist lay people often give the impression that they wandered in clouds of speech and text, attempting to discern which messages were intended to guide them along the way to salvation, and which were intended to throw them astray. At times, one can almost see the proverbial demon on one shoulder and angel on the other. This chapter examines this multiple media implicated in the conversion process of early Methodists.[20] Though the chapter loosely follows the conversion pattern as outlined in the narratives, the polyvalent nature of the media does not always allow for a strictly chronological order.

[20] Within this work, "media" is intended to include both print and oratory. For instance, the experience of hearing a sermon is considered distinct from (but not inferior to) that of reading a sermon.

There is no shortage of scholarship concerning "Methodist media." Library bookshelves abound with studies of Wesleyan hymn texts, sermons of Methodist leaders, and the sizeable output of the Methodist press. This chapter's contribution to the dialogue is twofold. First, it examines early Methodist media from the perspective of lay people. The majority of scholarship concerning "media" tends to focus on the printed resources of early Methodism and the literary output of the Wesleys. Rather than examining the syntax of Charles Wesley's poetry or tracing the development of John Wesley's sermonic language, for example, this study is instead concerned with how lay people experienced, interpreted and transmitted these media. What texts or ideas were impressed most profoundly upon their minds and hearts? How did they respond to the messages they encountered? In what ways did they in turn utilize these media to express their experiences and convictions? Second, the chapter expands the concept of media to welcome phenomena not traditionally recognized as significant or legitimate means of communicating: wordless utterances, feelings (emotions), supernatural voices and "holy conversation." These categories have been gleaned from early Methodists themselves as they have constructed and reconstructed their conversion experiences in narrative form.

Evangelical preaching

In the first decades of the movement, the average person encountering Methodism for the first time was likely to do so at an outdoor preaching event, which seems to have attracted massive numbers of hearers. Driven by necessities of space and the circumstance of being prohibited from preaching in churches, George Whitefield began preaching outdoors in 1739. According to John Pawlin, the attendance at his first few

outdoor sermons grew exponentially. He preached first to "not above two hundred persons," then a second time to around 2,000, and then a third time to over 10,000.[21] William Seward, an associate of George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, wrote to his godson describing the unprecedented scene:

> At 4 o clock on the mount there was by computation 10000 or 12000 and all were still and all could here. We sung the 100 psalm. The trees, hedges, ditches and fields were coverd. It was a blessed day like midsumer warm and not a cloud in the sky. It was never so seen in our nation. All glory be to God 'twas worth going 10000 miles to see. Mr. Whitfield was almost tir'd in pulling of his hat as we rid to town again the road being thick lin'd every way there were coaches and horses single and double.[22]

Shortly before his departure to America, Whitefield convinced John Wesley to follow in his footsteps, whereupon John "submitted to be more vile," preaching outside for the first time in March or April of 1739 to about 3,000 people.[23] After John's departure from the Bristol area, his brother Charles took up where he left off.

Accordingly, those in the region of Bristol had a unique perspective on early Methodism, as they experienced all three famed preachers in a short period of time. Several early Methodists recount their first impressions of Whitefield and the Wesleys. Naomi Thomas recalled her delight in hearing Whitefield "wherever he preached or expounded." Despite her intellectual assent to his "report," "the arm of the Lord was but in little or no degree revealed to me."[24] Similarly, Elizabeth Sais heard Whitefield constantly, approving of his doctrine, "which seemed as a lovely song of one that hath a

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[21] John S. Pawlyn, *Bristol Methodism in John Wesley's Day with Monographs of the Early Methodist Preachers* (Bristol: W. C. Hemmons, 1877), 11, 14.
[22] William Seward to Scipio Africanus, 26 February 1738, DDSe 1/14, MARC.
[23] Journal entry, 2 April 1739 in eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, vol. 19 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976-), 46 (hereafter JWW).
[24] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.

pleasant voice." Nevertheless, though "the word came very sweet," her "understanding was not opened."[25]

During his last sermon at Rosegreen before travelling to America, George Whitefield introduced John Wesley in messianic overtones as "the one coming after him whose [shoe laces] he was not worthy to unloose."[26] Though Mary Thomas immediately found "great love in [her] heart" for John, he did not make a strong first impression on everyone.[27] Elizabeth Sais heard John for the first time in the Nicholas Street society, but reports that "at that time the word had very little effect on me." The second time, however, "the word came very sweet and with power, and I shed tears, but knew not well for what reason."[28] Likewise, Martha Jones initially found John "little better than a Mr. Broughton." Upon hearing him again, she wrote, "[I] felt he was a teacher sent by God. My heart was knit to him, and I thought I could follow him over the world."[29] One can only speculate what accounts for these "delayed reactions." Perhaps it took John a little time to grow accustomed to his new "vile" manner of preaching, or perhaps these women were passing through a period of mourning for Whitefield. In any case, it seems that John's lukewarm debut was not enough to deter certain spectators from returning a second time.

In 1738, John departed for Germany to better acquaint himself with the German Moravians. At this point, his brother Charles replaced him, continuing the work of preaching and pastoral care. The majority of writers appeared to favor Charles, which is

[25] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[26] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[29] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.

little surprise considering that they were writing their spiritual accounts at the request of Charles. Martha Jones wrote of the comfort she received from his sermons. For instance, his popular sermon on the "threefold state" helped to situate her within a progression of spiritual development.[30] She discovered that she was one of those who were seeking but had not yet found God.[31] Mary Thomas, by contrast, gave a frank account of her emotional state following the arrival of Charles:

> When you came first to Bristoll, I seem to like you better than your brother. I thought your way of delivery was finer than his. I thought I should be easier in my mind in hearing of you then I was in hearing of him. But alass I found it wors and worse and worse every day.[32]

While this may appear to be a critique in many milieus, Mary Thomas's distressed mind (as she later interprets it) represents a movement toward evangelical conversion. Thus, her statement functions not as a critique of Charles's preaching, but rather as verification of its efficacy. This will be discussed in further detail below.

One of the legacies of evangelicalism consists in its persuasive manner of delivery. Though evangelicals and their predecessors turned to the same biblical texts, something about the evangelical medium affected hearers in a new way. Naomi Thomas recounted that John Wesley "preach[ed] his word in such a clear way and manner… which made me often think it was another gospel, in comparison of what I heard before."[33] Similarly, Sarah Colston expressed her astonishment at the preaching of George Whitefield: "Never was there a speaker like this man," she exclaimed after

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[30] Charles preached this sermon at least twenty-one times in 1738 and 1739. See Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 130.
[31] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.
[32] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128.
[33] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.

hearing him in 1737.[34] Ann Gilbert also felt herself greatly affected upon hearing Mr. Williams in Cornwall in 1743: "His serious and earnest manner of praying and preaching were such as I never heard before, and his word was as a flame of fire, to soften and melt my heart. I shed many tears during the sermon, and was clearly convinced that the Methodists were a people going to heaven."[35]

In an effort to vindicate Methodists, Joseph Williams wrote a glowing account of Methodist worship which he submitted to Charles with hopes of publication. In it, he described Charles's manner of speaking:

> I found him standing upon a table, in an erect posture, with his hands & eyes lifted up to heaven in prayer, surrounded with (I guess) more than a thousand people' some few of them persons of fashion, both men and women, but most of them of the lower rank of mankind. I know not how long he had been engaged in the duty before I came, but he continued therein, after my coming, scarce a quarter of an hour; during which time he prayed with uncommon fervency, fluency, & variety of proper expression. He then preached about an hour from such a manner as I have seldom, if ever, heard any minister preach .[36]

It seems clear that a certain percentage of hearers were attracted to the charisma of these Methodist leaders and the novelty of the medium. Some women (and even certain men) struggled with infatuation, responding readily to the pastoral concern and attention of Methodist preachers.[37] After hearing Mr. Andrews, a dissenting minister, Sarah Crosby "thought there was not such another man upon earth… I had many

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[34] Paul Chilcote, ed., *In Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 44.
[35] Ibid., 46-51.
[36] Joseph Williams to Charles Wesley, 17 October1739, DDPr 1/92, MARC.
[37] See, for example, John Hutchinson to Charles Wesley, 31 October 1752, EMV 72: "Your desire I will not expect too much from your friendship. Indeed I do not. I will not ascribe to the instrument what must be affected by almighty God, but you will not be angry with me because I love you. I hold you in great esteem. Had I not a very high opinion of you, I shod be more ungratefull than I am. As to my love, I think it is of the right sort and such. I hope as was betwixt David and Jonathan. I dreamt last night of being with my dear CW, and I don't know what is the matter with me all this day. I feel my heart so exceedingly enlarged towards you, insomuch that I think I cod almost pull out my own eyes to do you service."

difficulties to break through; but was fixed to lose my life rather than not hear him."[38] Elizabeth Halfpenny found herself so affected by the words of John Wesley that she "rather esteemed him as a saviour than a minister, and so continued in that dreadful state for about a year, my soul never being at rest but when I was with him, or hearing him talked of." She was much ashamed of her "idolatrous love," about which John himself had often warned. Eventually, she was able to confide in Mr. Howers at Kingswood, who seemed not at all surprised by her plight.[39]

One might employ the psychological term "transference" to describe the intense attraction of these (predominantly) women to charismatic male preachers. It is not uncommon for persons in "therapeutic" situations to misinterpret professional concern for the individual as romantic interest, or at least to be attracted by the concentrated attention and understanding they may be lacking in their daily lives. In the historical context of early Methodism, however, the danger revolved around aberrant theology rather than the transgression of professional boundaries. In fixing one's affections on a preacher rather than on Christ, one distorts the gospel, substituting an earthly infatuation for relationship with the divine.

In general, however, early lay people did not spill much ink describing their impressions of the gathering or the preachers themselves. Rather, they recalled in detail the texts expounded and their first impressions of evangelical doctrine as it related to

[38] Zechariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women*, vol. 2 (London, 1825), 26.
[39] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.

their individual spiritual condition. They focused their attention exactly where the preachers directed it—to the state of their own souls.

Responses to preaching

When the average person first encountered Methodist preachers, they were likely to have been met with a message of damnation designed to shock them out of their worldly complacency. In Methodist terminology, this first contact with evangelical doctrine was known as "awakening." Charles and John Wesley were convinced that the law—rhetoric of judgment based on the Old Testament—was first necessary to turn people away from their worldly attachments and fleshly desires, and to instill in them a profound desire for salvation through Christ. On June 23, 1738, Charles recorded in his journal that he visited a "poor old woman" who consistently refused to go to church. Though he expected to need to preach the law, he was pleasantly surprised to find "her ready for the gospel, and glad to exchange her merits for Christ's."[40]

Once hardened hearts were malleable enough, they could then receive the comfort and assurance of the gospel. Joseph Williams observed in Charles Wesley "a most vehement desire… to convince his hearers that they were all by nature in a state of enmity against God, consequently in a damnable state, & needed reconciliation to God."[41] The subsequent in-between period, after having been persuaded that one's salvation was not necessarily assured but prior to receiving confirmation that it was, was referred to as "convictions." During this time, Methodists were frequently brought into

[40] S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth G. C. Newport, eds., *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* vol. 1, 23 June 1738 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 123-24 (hereafter CWJ).
[41] Joseph Williams to Charles Wesley, 17 October1739, DDPr 1/92, MARC.

the depths of despair knowing that they were damned, but knowing also that they were powerless to do anything about it. The confusion and frustration took them beyond the realm of the intellectual into the foreign territory of feelings, or emotions as one might say today.

Early Methodist writers tended to focus on three particular aspects of this new and "strange doctrine." First, they recognized that their previous system of works righteousness was invalid and could not guarantee their salvation. Those who thought themselves good and respectable soon learned that they were in fact sinners, even if they had committed no legal crime. Mary Thomas confessed that she previously thought herself as good as her neighbors "and a great deal better then some of them that did curs and swear and gott drunk." After hearing John Wesley preach, however, she was soon convinced that she had been deceiving herself.[42] Likewise, Elizabeth Halfpenny was "staggered" when she heard Charles Wesley say that she "might be put on a level with whores and drunkards and outward sinners."[43]

Methodist hearers were further surprised to learn that despite their best efforts to live an inoffensive life, they had actually broken all of God's commandments. James Flewit reflected, "I was disobedient to all the commands of God… I have violated evry command of God in the gros sence, accepting murder & that in the spiritual sence, a thousand times."[44] On September 10, 1739, Sarah Middleton heard John Wesley preach on Acts 16:30, in which he expounds on the cry of the trembling jailor, "What must I do

[42] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128.
[43] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.
[44] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.

to be saved!"[45] His words struck her as "sharper… than a two edged sword," as she determined that she, too, had broken every commandment.[46]

As if it was not enough to realize that one's soul was in such a perilous state, Methodists were also faced with the challenging news that they were unable to help themselves. Instead, it was God and God alone who effected salvation. Methodist preachers insisted that their hearers could not only know that they were saved, but that they could also feel the assurance of their salvation. Elizabeth Downes confirmed the futility of self-reliance with her experience:

> I strove to help my self by my works. That afforded me no peace. I knew if I died as I was, I should be damned, but had a hope God would forgive me when I came to die, yet perfectly ignorant of any inward feeling in my soul, not so much as the drawings of the father to distinguish itt.[47]

Though she had not yet developed her capacity for spiritual feelings, she began to sense that her own efforts were failing her. As will be discussed shortly, the use of feelings as an indicator of one's salvation proved challenging for many Methodists. The initial message of damnation, however, served to jump start these feelings and to strike at the core of hearers' sentiments. As Sarah Middleton recalled of George Whitefield's message of damnation, "Them words usd to sink deep into my Heart."[48]

According to the minutes of a preachers' gathering in 1746, the sermons that yielded the "greatest blessing" were "1. Such as are most close, convincing and practical. 2. Such as have most of Christ the Priest, the Atonement. 3. Such as urge the heinousness

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[45] Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 138 (hereafter CWS).
[46] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5.
[47] Elizabeth Downes to Charles Wesley, 13 April 1742, EMV 53.
[48] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5.

of men living in contempt or ignorance of Him."[49] Judging by the anguished responses of many hearers, it would seem that these tactics met with some success. In fact, preachers began to suspect that in preaching "too much of the wrath and too little of the love of God," they might be obscuring the "joy of faith."[50] They concluded in 1746 that doing so "generally hardens them that believe not, and discourages them that do."[51] They also affirmed that it was not practical to preach terror to those who were already assured of faith, "for love is to them the strongest of all motives."[52]

After being confronted with the preachers' message of damnation, early lay people responded in a variety of ways, though many who wrote seem to have been instantly plunged into the depths of despair. Mary Maddern, for instance, "felt the burden of sin indeed intolrable," and "was for several mounths in deep distress of soul." Though she attended preaching constantly (or perhaps because of it), she saw herself "wors and wors, and farder and farder as I thought from God."[53] Through this emotional awakening, early Methodists entered into the choreography of salvation's drama. The troubled state of their hearts and minds further implicated them in the evangelical enterprise of saving souls and bringing individuals into relationship with Christ. Concern for one's spiritual state provided more than ample motivation for adopting Methodist practices and vocabulary.

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[49] *Publications of the Wesley Historical Society–John Bennet's Copy of the Minutes of the Conferences of 1744, 1745, 1747 and 1748; with Wesley's Copy of those for 1746* (London: Wesley Historical Society, 1896), 36 (hereafter CM).
[50] Ibid., 22, 46.
[51] Ibid., 36.
[52] Ibid., 22.
[53] Mary Maddern to Charles Wesley, 29 June, 1762, EMV 105.

Some entered into the dialogue almost immediately, responding out of their distress by crying out to God, to Jesus or to themselves. Ann Martin recalled that during her time of conviction, "the lord gave me power to cry out, 'Jesus thou son of David have mercy upon me.'"[54] The phrase most frequently exclaimed, however, was one often encouraged by Methodist preachers: "What shall I do to be saved?" Based on Acts 16:30, the question demonstrated that one had recognized the need for salvation and that one was willing to be taught a new way.[55] Though some seemed to have literally shouted this aloud in the context of a worship service, others more likely expressed it silently. Sister Ibison wrote, "I sad, 'O what shall I do to be saved.' I am suer that I spake from my very soul, for …my joy was as as [sic] great as my sorrow."[56] This statement demonstrates the emotional turbulence in which Methodists found themselves—simultaneously mourning their damnation while rejoicing in the possibility of salvation. Sister Ibison also quickly made the link between feelings and authenticity, as her joy and sorrow confirmed for her the participation of her soul in crying out for salvation.

Despite their frequent and fervent exclamations, both aloud and in writing, Methodists often found that language failed to capture the longing. Many cried out wordless utterances. In his journal entries from the 1740s, Charles Wesley seemed to accept and even glory in these outbursts. For him, they confirmed the work of God in

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[54] Ann Martin to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 4.

[55] Acts 16:30-31 KJV, "After an earthquake opened all the prison doors, the jailor was on the point of killing himself as he believed all prisoners to have fled. "**28** But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. **29** Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,**30** And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? **31** And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. **32** And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. **33** And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

[56] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.

altering the hearts and habits of the audience. After preaching on Mark 1:15, Charles recounted, "the word came with power irresistible. The cries of the wounded almost drowned my voice. One, I afterwards heard, received a cure."[57] On another remarkable occasion, he wrote, "God broke us to pieces with the hammer of his word, Jeremiah 31, and the room was filled with strong cries and prayers and pierced the clouds."[58]

Another hallmark phrase used to give voice to the agonizing wait for deliverance was "groaning for redemption." Taken from the eighth chapter of Romans, the expression demonstrated one's sincere yearning to be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."[59] According to Misty Anderson's examination of Isaac Watts, certain out-loud manifestations such as groaning, singing and sighing functioned in the eighteenth century as an "outward expression of inward sincerity and spiritual devotion."[60] As with the question "What must I do to be saved," the idea (if not the act) of groaning for redemption recognizes the need for salvation and demonstrates one's receptivity to being taught.

In his younger days, Charles Wesley himself groaned "under the intolerable weight of inherent misery" during a period of depression in the colony of Georgia.[61] It seems that the idea of groaning spiritually was important for him personally, as he

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[57] CWJ, vol. 2, 29 September 1747, 511.
[58] Ibid., 481.
[59] Acts 8:19-23 KJV, "**19** For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. **20** For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, **21** Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. **23** And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."
[60] Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 179.
[61] Charles Wesley to Sally Kirkham, 5 February 1736, DDCW 1/5, MARC.

referenced it constantly in his own journal and correspondence. Charles recalled having preached a sermon on "The whole creation groaneth" in 1744: "We felt the truth, and joined in the universal travail."[62] One might imagine that his own experiences of physical and emotional infirmity lent him a palpable sympathy for others similarly distressed. In an encouraging letter written in 1747 to a Mr. Hardwick, Charles Wesley exhorted him to give himself to God entirely and to "groan for deliverance."[63]

Whether it was due to Charles's personal resonance with the text or the fact of having encountered the concept of groaning through the various channels of Methodist media, early Methodists quickly and readily adopted a vocabulary of groaning. A startling number of early writers utilized the biblical text word for word to describe their period of restless convictions, caught between the desire to change and the temptation to remain the same.[64] Though Nathaniel Hurst reported that he was "groaning under [his] corruptions, longing to be delivered," he confessed he did not do so as much as he ought to have, as he sometimes grew "cold and cearless."[65]

In 1766, Charles Wesley wrote to Ann Davis asking her whether she was still "groaning to be delivered from sin and pain," presumably following an operation to remove a cancerous tumor from her breast. She responded that she was "opresstd beyond expression with this painful body" and that her "spirit as well as flesh [was] ready to fail, whitch [made her] groan with bitter groanings indeed." Just a few lines down, however, she prayed that she might "be a thankfull pertaker of [Jesus'] sufferings without a

[62] CWJ, vol. 2, 4 April 1744, 402.
[63] Charles Wesley to Mr. Hardwick, 22 December 1747, DDCW 1/16A, MARC.
[64] See, for example, Eliza Mann: "I groan to be deliverd from this bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Eliza Mann to Charles Wesley, January 1742, EMV 107.
[65] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15.

mummering groan."[66] It seems then, that while groaning for redemption was a necessary endeavor in the early stages of conversion, groaning as a response to trials and tribulations was undesirable for the mature Christian. In that case, the ideal was to endure suffering patiently, calmly and quietly. For most early writers who mention it in the early narratives, however, mournful expressions functioned as signs of sincerity, as they came straight from the heart and could not have been expressed authentically in any other fashion. Martha Jones professed, "I poured out my complaints to my dear redeemer in tears and groans, for otherwise I could not pray."[67]

There was, however, another level of spiritual affectiveness beyond wordless cries and groans. This was described by Charles Wesley in his account of a sermon he preached at Crowan in 1744, in which "several hid their faces, and mourned inwardly, being too deeply affected to cry out."[68] In this case, the inability to muster a sound expressed the depth of holy grief. Charles wrote of a similar occurrence at a society meeting at Conham in 1746:

> A loud cry was heard at first. But it sunk lower and lower, into the groans that could not be uttered. This joyful mourning continued two hours. The Spirit of the Lord was upon me as a Spirit of power and love. I thought I could at that time have laid down my life for their salvation.[69]

This sweet, silent distress also has roots in Romans 8, wherein it is written, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."[70]

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[66] Ann Davis to Charles Wesley, 25 April 1766, EMV 47.
[67] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.
[68] CWJ, vol. 2, 19 July 1744, 409.
[69] Ibid., 457.
[70] Acts 8:26, KJV.

In this context, the groanings that come from the Spirit provide consolation to the penitent, as the Spirit accomplishes what the flesh cannot do for itself. This text evidently comforted Ann Martin in her time of physical distress, as she cited it in a letter to Charles.[71]

Though some accepted without question the propriety or necessity of their mournful expressions, whether silent or aloud, not all were so sure of themselves. Elizabeth Hinsom recalled that during her time of convictions, she was beset by "corrupt pashons." She attempted to cry out to the Lord, but found that her mouth was "stopt" and that she could "do nothing but weap." She spoke of the experience to her band, who affirmed that it was a good prayer. She herself, however, had doubts: "Thay said it was a good prayr but I did not think so. I thought if I spak it wold be beter."[72]

Feelings

Those encountering Methodism for the first time during the early decades had to navigate not only "strange" messages and novel media, but also a new way of knowing and interpreting the self. Many early Methodists, whether previous churchgoers or not, found themselves affected in new ways that they were not always able to explain. While hearing John Wesley preach in 1739, Sarah Colston felt a "strange alteration" in her heart.[73] William Barber also "found something of a strong alterration" in himself such as

[71] Ann Martin to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 4.
[72] Elizabeth Hinsom to Charles Wesley, 25 May 1740, EMV 2.
[73] Chilcote, ed., *In Her Own Story*, 44.

he had never before experienced. While hearing John Wesley preach on Jesus' invitation to the thirsty and poor, he could not stop the tears from flowing.[74]

Methodist preachers did certainly intend to touch their audiences on an emotional level. They therefore kept an eye out for signs that audience members were internalizing evangelical messages. Charles Wesley reported in his journal in 1746, "Read prayers and preached in Tresmeer church. They seemed to *feel* the word of reconciliation."[75] Early preachers strove to stir feelings not as a manipulative device, but because they believed that genuine transformation occurred not only in the intellect, but in the soul. As such, they developed a sort of vocabulary of feeling to interpret the ways God was working in the lives of individuals. For example, words such as "sinking," "melting" and "piercing" indicated that God was in the process of overcoming the corrupt self. Charles Wesley recalled preaching near Rode "to a barn full of simple, hungry, seeking souls. They sunk under the hammer, and melted before the fire of the word."[76] In this way, outwardly visible feelings confirmed interior work. Hannah Hancock recounted her response to a sermon preached by John Wesley on Ezra 9:5-6, "He shewed the remore of consciene after a soul ad revoulted from Crist. My soul wtnesed what was then spok. I was then under remoree."[77] Through the sermon, she became a participant in the text. Her

[74] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 20.
[75] CWJ, vol. 2, 25 June 1746, 464.
[76] Ibid., 8 October 1745, 450.
[77] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86. Ezra 9:5-6 KJV, "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, and said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens."

feelings then confirmed her role, as she identified emotionally not only with Ezra, but also with John Wesley's hypothetical "revoulted" soul.

It happened frequently that early Methodists were confused about how to identify and interpret their feelings. Fortunately, in their sermons Charles and John Wesley specified exactly what people could (or should) expect to experience along the road to conversion. They even specified what Methodists should cry out in the meantime: What must I do to be saved? This was, however, a bit of a trick question, as Methodists were also taught that they were powerless to effect their own salvation. Perhaps the unspoken question that more accurately describes the wonderings of early Methodists is, "How will I know that I am saved?"

Despite the detailed descriptions of the life stages of a Christian, Methodists were not always sure if their feelings matched those given in sermons. They were plagued with doubts and fears, unsure if the provenance of their feelings was divine or demonic. They were also greatly distressed if they did not manifest the appropriate feelings at the appropriate time. Martha Jones began to doubt her justification because, as she wrote, "I did not always feel it so strongly as at the first."[78] Elizabeth Downes recalled being troubled at her inability to effect an emotional response. A fellow society member approached her, brimming with joy at what God had done for her. Downes concluded that as she had not yet experienced the same thing, she must be damned. At that moment, she found herself in a "miserable condition" and wished she had never been born. She continued:

[78] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.

> The Sunday following I went to meetting. Mr. Caper was to deliver the sacrament. He took his text out of the Revalations, "and I beheld and lo in the throne and of the four beasts and in the midst of the elders stood a lamb as itt had been slain." His discourse upon that subiect was very affecting, yet itt did not reach me. I was troubled att the hardness of my heart and thought there was no help for me. I continued in that dead stupid condition till sermon was ended. I began to think I am dead and cold and have neither life nor power.[79]

Others shared that they felt "dead and cold in prayer," longing for an ecstatic experience such as their contemporaries had.[80]

Some scholars, Phyllis Mack in particular, have contended that these intense emotional manifestations eventually subsided as individuals continued to integrate into the Methodist network of spiritual and social care.[81] There is certainly some evidence to support this, but there is also some indication that certain spiritually mature Methodists looked longingly toward their early days, wishing they could once again experience the fervor of their "first love." In 1768, William Holder heard the testimony of a Mr. Valton. Valton's witness reminded Holder of what he had experienced himself three or four years prior. He exclaimed, "Oh! How did my heart burn within me, for I felt my soul greatly inclined to seek it again and believe it new."[82]

Taking a longer view, other historians have preferred to look upon emotional manifestations as an early tendency that Methodism quickly and wisely outgrew. While it does seem that the early decades were a rather special time in the history of Methodism, the new reliance on "feelings" set the stage for evangelicalism's next few

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[79] Elizabeth Downes to Charles Wesley, 13 April 1742, EMV 53.
[80] See, for example, Ann Martin, EMV 4: "Some times I was dead and cold in prayer. I thought I could only lay before the lord till he gave me power." Elizabeth Hinsom, EMV 2: "I whent to the sacrament but fond my self stil cold. Theas words of the hymn I knew to be my case: 'Nigh with my lips to thee I draw unconscious at thy alter' found far of my heart nor touchtd with awe nor moved.'"
[81] Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 35.
[82] William Holder journal, 13 October 1768, Diaries Collection, MARC.

centuries. From the dramatic conversion experiences encouraged by Charles Grandison Finney and other celebrated evangelists to the sentimental lyrics of much evangelical music, emotions and emotionalism have become an indispensable component of "evangelicalism."[83] Though the task of tracing this evolution lies beyond the scope of this work, it is worth taking seriously the historic function of emotions in the context of public worship and individual spiritual development, for there are more subtleties than meet the eye. Charles Wesley, for example, distinguished between the emotionalism of the newly converted and that of mature Christian experience. He rejoiced after having preached near Fonmon in 1744:

> O how delightfully did we mourn after him whom our soul loveth – not with the noisy turbulent sorrow of newly-awakened souls which most times passes away as a morning-cloud, but with the deep contrition of love. All the congregation was in tears, in silent tears of desire or joy. This is the mourning wherewith I pray the Lord to bless me, till he wipes away all tears from my eyes.[84]

While many early writers were greatly impressed by the sermons they witnessed, Methodists also encountered the evangelical message through various other media: printed materials, oral speech, supernatural speech, or some combination of the three.

Texts read aloud

Methodist preachers circulated their own personal writings for the benefit of lay people. These were often read aloud in society meetings, either by the preachers themselves when present or other leaders. Those who remarked on it found great comfort and encouragement in hearing the experiences of others. Margarit Austin heard Charles

[83] Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) was a Presbyterian/Congregational preacher and a prominent leader of the Second Great Awakening in the United States.
[84] CWJ, vol. 2, 11 August 1744, 416-17.

Wesley read his own journal on several occasions. She seemed particularly impressed when he spoke on the second anniversary of having received remission of sins.[85] In the case of Sarah Barber, the hearing of Charles's journal led to both a vision and a supernatural voice:

> Sister Robinson told me you gave her Leave to bring us to hear your Journals for which I have Reason to Praise God : for in your Prayers I Saw my Saviour Bleeding on the Cross and the Lord Shewed me my unworthiness in it So that I was astonished and Stood amazed to think it was for me. I heard the voice Saying this I Do for my own Sake.[86]

At this point, most of the lives read *aloud* were those of still-living people rather than historic saints or famous personages. The recounting of a real life-in-progress offered a freshness and immediacy distinctive from tales of martyrs and others long-dead, particularly when the author read his or her own writings. Hearers seemed to take heart that God was very near, and that assurance of faith was indeed possible in this lifetime.

Among the early writers, Elizabeth Downes distinguished herself as one of the few to record a negative experience while hearing a text read aloud. After her justification, she heard someone read the journal of William Seward. She recalled, "I sate by and found immediately I was disaffected to the author. Then I felt instantly I had lost that sweet peace which before I injoyed."[87] Though it was the one time she remembers losing her sense of justification, she happily reported that the experience was not strong enough to make her fall into doubt.

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[85] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[86] Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 7.
[87] Elizabeth Downes to Charles Wesley, 13 April 1742, EMV 53.

Hymns

Methodists also circulated hymns, which seemed to flow steadily from the pen of Charles Wesley and sundry others. Hymns were commonly used for devotional reading, though many early writers spoke of hearing and singing hymns in the context of worship, whether public, private or familial. Clearly, the musical element greatly enhanced the transformative potential of religious poetry. Through both text and the bodily experience of singing, hymns "enabled communication between self and community and between self and God, [standing as] models of sincere speech and authentic emotion."[88] Fanny Cowper expressed her gratitude for the "sweet hymns" sent by Charles Wesley, "wich we have sung every day since we have had 'em."[89] She reported that Lady Huntington continued to support her and her sister by explaining scriptures, praying and singing with them. In another example of domestic use, Elizabeth Halfpenny recalled being "in some measure supported under [her] heavy burthen" when she heard Mr. Richards and Mr. Ellison singing "O thou who when I did complain" during breakfast.[90]

In a letter written to his wife, Charles Wesley mentioned with delight that a woman from Bath received benefit from one of his hymns. She had heard Charles speak one evening, and after returning home in "deepest distress," she opened to a hymn at random: "Who is the humbling sinner who." She immediately received a promise

[88] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 48.
[89] Fanny Cowper to Charles Wesley, 8 March 1741, EMV 43.
[90] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.

applied to her heart and continued "unspeakably happy for 2 years." Charles remarked that she maintained a chariot for the sole purpose of attending preaching.[91]

Others recounted powerful experiences of hymns in the context of group worship. It was while singing the words "Thy mercy never shall remove, thy nature and thy name is love" that William Holder received confirmation of God's work in his soul. He averred, "I could not doubt the truth of it, the Lord shone so clear upon his work."[92] Thomas Middleton wrote of an especially significant day in his conversion process. Of a morning service at the Foundery he wrote, "the hymns and preaching seemed to be directed immediately to me. They was to my soul as healing medicens." Just before receiving communion, Charles Wesley gave out a hymn of mercy and deliverance. Middleton recalled, "It was so suitable to me that it reached my very heart. All that day I thought I could desire no greater happyness than to mourn and weep continually." A paragraph later in his narrative, Middleton quoted from a Charles Wesley hymn, "Depth of Mercy! Can there be," presumably the same he referenced just before.[93] Though a sermon preached at the chapel on West Street failed to move John Walsh, the two last lines of a hymn instantly freed him from his "besetting temptation." He recalled, "To the best of my remembrance, I heard only this: 'Mourning's o'er, look up for thou shalt weep no more.' And instantly lifting up my soul in strong hope, I wished for the repetition of

[91] Charles Wesley to Sarah Wesley, 7 September 1766, DDCW 7/13.
[92] William Holder journal, 4 November 1768, Diaries Collection, MARC.
[93] As quoted in the narrative: "Whence to me this wast[e] of love / Ask my advocate above / See the cause in Jesus' face / Now before the throne of grace." Hymn published in John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1740).

those lines, but when sung again could only hear, 'Thy warfare o-er, look up, for thou shalt weep no more.'"[94]

Encouraging literacy

Methodist leaders promulgated the evangelical message through public discourse, the reading aloud of personal experiences and the singing of carefully selected hymns. Perhaps their greatest legacy, however, consisted in their indefatigable promotion of literacy. Not only did early Methodists hear the spoken and sung word—they were also encouraged to engage themselves with the printed word. To that end, John Wesley launched an immense publication scheme initially based in Bristol. In fact, during the 1740s more than three-quarters of Bristol's entire publication output came from the Methodists.[95] This ensured Bristol's place as a leading center of publication until the mid-1770s, when the headquarters of Methodist printing shifted away from the city.[96] This period corresponds with what G. J. Barker-Benfield identifies as "the steepest acceleration in literacy"; from the 1750s to 1800, the percentage of literate persons in Britain increased from roughly half to a vast majority.[97] Historian John Walsh observes:

> Time and again, in the case histories of conversions, one comes across the 'old books'—sometimes a close-knit theological treatise, sometimes (especially in the case of less educated men, like Wesley's preachers) an awakening tract, like Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, or, above all, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding,* which was still brooded over in many humble cottages. Often they led a man

[94] John Walsh to Charles Wesley, 11 August 1762, EMV 134.
[95] Jonathan Barry, "Methodism and the Press in Bristol 1737-1775," Wesley Historical Society, Bristol Branch, *Bulletin* 64 (1993), 2.
[96] Ibid., 1.
[97] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 60.

> already awakened to find peace of mind, or helped a man already converted to discover a satisfying theological basis for his spiritual life.[98]

Shortly before his death, John Wesley again affirmed the importance of literacy within Christian spirituality, declaring, "It cannot be that the people should grow in grace, unless they give themselves to reading. A reading people will always be a knowing people."[99] Several early Methodists reflected on the influence of reading upon the state of their souls.

Religious texts

About a year before writing his narrative, William Turner borrowed Mr. Romaine's commentary on the Song of Songs from a friend. Upon reading Romaine's discourse, Turner found himself "not right because I could not call Jesus Christ my beloved and my friend from my heart." He began to feel himself in need of a savior, and soon began attempting to live according to the example of Jesus. Having been shown the "spirituality of the law," he endeavored to rely on God's righteousness instead of his own and to "die to all outward sins." He saw his own "very stony heart" and "great want of faith," exacerbated by his "bossom sin" of "creature comfort."[100] While it seems that he also had experiences with preaching events, his initial awakening was prompted by reading Romaine's commentary.

After receiving *The Great Importance of a Religious Life* as a gift from a friend in 1735, Mrs. Plat opened the book to these words: "Be faithful unto death and I will give

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[98] John Walsh, "Origins of the Evangelical Revival" in *Essays in Modern English Church History, in Memory of Normal Sykes*, eds. G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (London: Black, 1966), 159.
[99] John Wesley to George Holder, 8 November 1790 in John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley* vol. 8 (London: Epworth, 1931), 247.
[100] William Turner to Charles Wesley, 9 March 1756, EMV 130.

thee the crown of life." This prompted her to consider her past life, upon which she "cried out with the trembling jaylor, 'What must I do to be saved?'" Immediately after her awakening, she was plunged into a crisis in which she sees "nothing but the sight of hell before mine eyes."[101] Though her awakening did not take place in a preaching environment, her vocabulary and pattern of speech regarding her experience is similar to that of those who were awakened by more "experiential" means. While it does not seem that she attended Methodist preaching before her awakening, it was nearly two years after her first preaching encounter in 1738 that she wrote her narrative, and therefore she had ample time to interpret retrospectively her awakening in evangelical terms.

James Flewit also followed the traditional conversion pattern after having been awakened by a book, this time a "little book upon the new birth, written by a dissenter." The necessity of being born again seemed a strange thing to Flewit, as did his subsequent desire to pray. Like Mrs. Plat, Flewit "was ready to cry out 'What must I do to be sav'd?'" Unlike some other Methodists who wrestled with this question for a long time, Flewit very quickly understood its futility. He wrote, "God soon show'd me it was to have something done in me & for me which could not be done by me."[102] He then embarked on a search to understand what it means to have salvation accomplished *for* him rather than *by* him.

George Whitefield himself had an awakening experience while reading a book borrowed from Charles Wesley, John Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. From this text, he learned that religion was more than a series of external obligations, but

[101] Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10.
[102] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.

rather "an Union of the Soul with GOD, and *Christ* formed within us; a Ray of divine Light was instantaneously darted in upon my Soul, and from that Moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new Creature." Shortly after, he adopted the discipline of Charles Wesley and the other fellow Methodists in Oxford.[103]

Early writers also frequently expressed both a desire and gratitude for Wesleyan sermons, hymns and journals, by far the most preferred non-biblical reading material. Correspondents of Charles Wesley constantly thanked him for materials already received and ventured gentle reminders concerning materials not yet received. Fanny Cowper, for example, expressed gratitude for a prayer book she received from Charles.[104] One sailor wrote of a most extraordinary zeal for Charles Wesley's sermons among his fellow officers:

> Cap. Taylor had some usefull sermons to dispose of, [and] beged the favour of one or two for his perusal. We sent Mr. Charles's "Awake thou that sleepeth" and other such as we had. The next day, another such message came from another ship, and I think the next day another. Then the officers came themselves and invited Cap. Taylor to dine with them. All the men are exceeding eager for reading them. Have several times offered money for them. Our second mate having business on board some of them generaly carried some with him. And he says the people are ready to jump overboard for them, into the boat, striving who shall get them first. Many I trust have left off outward profaness as well officers as men, and some I humbly hope have gone farther. I never heard or read or saw such work before… They eat the word, and some of them are under strong convictions…They are desirous to be taught by any body... O what is the Lord doing![105]

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[103] George Whitefield, *A short account of God's dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield… From his infancy, to the time of his entring into holy orders* (London, 1740), 27-32. See also Isabel Rivers's chapter "Scougal's The Life of God in the Soul of Man: The Fortunes of a Book, 1676-1830" in *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain*, ed. Ruth Savage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29-55.
[104] Fanny Cowper to Charles Wesley, 8 March 1741, EMV 43.
[105] Sailor to Charles Wesley, 2 March 1762, EMV 145.

Despite this unusual craze for religious reading material, not everyone responded positively to everything offered them. During a vividly-described conversation between Joseph Carter and a young apprentice, Carter was advised to purchase *A Choice Drop of Honey from the Rock of Christ*. While Carter did have a conversion experience shortly after, it seems it was the conversation itself that set the process in motion, for Carter did not even read the suggested book. At the moment of his conversion, he cried out, "O my dear Saviour, have I all my life time been rumiging over so many books to find salvation, & at last have found it in thee!" At his next encounter with the apprentice, he announced that he had no need of the book, "for I had Jesus Christ, & in him I had all things." Later in the narrative, however, Carter recounted that God reappeared to him after a period of darkness while he was reading the "tryals & temptations of the children of God." From this text, he concluded that his afflictions were due to 1) the inevitability (or perhaps necessity) that Christians suffer persecution, and 2) his own disobedience to the "dictates" of the Holy Spirit.[106]

Inappropriate reading material

The rise in publication was not confined to religious materials, but of course included other types of literature as well, such as novels, scientific texts and plays. For Methodist leaders and laity alike, there was little ambiguity about whether a particular text was wholesome and acceptable or dangerous and objectionable. Overtly evangelical religious material passed with flying colors, while frivolous entertainment, such as novels and plays, were expressly prohibited. Many early Methodists struggled with temptations

[106] Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 17.

to read forbidden literature. They confess their folly, usually in recounting their pre-conversion life and habits, and sometimes note their determination to read good literature. Following her confirmation at the age of fourteen, Martha Jones was given the writings of "sound church men" by her father.[107] Despite this encouragement, she soon discovered the sinful delight of attending and reading plays. It is possible that Mary Ramsay encountered similar temptations, for she wrote that after hearing George Whitefield preach, she resolved to "read nothing but good books" and to pray more.[108] She then logically turned her attention to reading Whitefield's sermons instead.

Many women seemed to find novels particularly distracting. Historian G. J. Barker-Benfield observes a resemblance between Methodism and the "cult of sensibility," which he claims stems from their identification with particularly feminine concerns.[109] He references as well the simultaneous rise of the "feminization of religion" and the "feminization of literature," noting that the majority of Methodists and the majority of fiction readers were women.[110] According to Barker-Benfield, the attraction of novels, as for the attraction of religion, rested in its sentimentality, which "allowed it to explore most extravagantly the powers of a language of feeling."[111] Both religion and literature, then, relied on the capacity to stir the emotions. It follows that those most susceptible to the emotionalism of evangelical religion would also likely be swept away by the romanticism of novels. Methodists (and very likely other evangelical and

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[107] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.
[108] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[109] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 269.
[110] Ibid. p. 272.
[111] John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 15.

otherwise religious adherents), however, took pains to distinguish clearly between good and bad literature, which resulted in a black-and-white categorization. Under no circumstances would anyone admit to a novel having any redeeming qualities.

In one of her two conversion accounts, Susannah Designe recounted to Charles Wesley her reading history. As a youth, she "grew Careless" and "Read History Books… which Carried my mind far from God and all that was good." At the age of ten, however, she was much affected by her reading of "Rusels Seven Sermons," which caused her to become "Serious" and to "often weep in Secret." Under this influence, she began reading the Bible "& all good Books." Following the death of her mother, however, she reverted to "follow[ing her] own will & foolish pleasure," choosing to read plays, romances and poetry instead of the scriptures. She reflected, "God was Seldom in all my thoughts."[112]

The inner conscience of the Methodist did not only oscillate between frivolous delights and serious ideals. It also struggled to discern truth from both religious and secular sources. Even seemingly harmless academic texts could be dangerous if they took one's attention away from the divine. In Susannah Designe's account, the problem concerning the reading of history books seemed to lie not in the content of the text itself, but in the fact that it distracted her from "God and all that was good."[113] Taverner Wallis, however, found himself distracted by studying "physic." The problem here seemed to be not the frivolous nature of the text, but the fact that it took him away from scriptures and distorted his image of the "kingdom of heaven," which he came to see as "consist[ing] in meals & drinks." Again, after reading an unnamed text recommended to

[112] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.
[113] Ibid.

him, despite the twinges of his conscience, Wallis was thrown into darkness "so that [he] went mourning for a whole day to find [God]."[114] These diverse accounts demonstrate the extent to which Methodists could be swayed by their choice of reading material, transported to realms of sweet ecstasy at one moment and plunged into doubts and confusion the next. This emotional roller coaster was not exclusively precipitated by reading, certainly, but rather represented the general state of a vulnerable soul searching for validation and assurance.[115]

Experiences and practices of reading

Methodism certainly played a significant role in promoting literacy among its adherents, but many early Methodists had already adopted certain religious reading practices prior to encountering Methodism. Mrs. Claggett described herself as a Bible addict from an early age, preferring the delight of reading scripture to other girlish diversions. Encouraged by her father's gift of a "folio bible with cuts," she could soon cite the chapter and verse of "every remarkable pasage." This so pleased her father that he took to showing her off in front of company "to sirprise them with what [she] had learnt." Claggett's mother, similarly proud, often recounted a story in which her daughter comforted her by reading "'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' which gave her immediate ease."[116]

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[114] Taverner Wallis to Charles Wesley, 24 November 1741, EMV 19.
[115] For more about the relationship between Methodism and the novel, see George Homer Williams, "'The Word Came with Power': Print, Oratory, and Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2002), 15, 31; and Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 66-68.
[116] Mrs. Claggett to Charles Wesley, 24 July 1738, EMV 41.

A number of early Methodists referenced their preparation for receiving sacrament in the Church of England, which consisted of reading a preparation manual during the week preceding the sacrament. This was the regular habit of Mary Ramsay, who prepared herself in such a manner every month. Others who mentioned it noted that they were preparing themselves to receive the sacrament for the very first time. Susannah Designe confessed a reliance on the preparation manual instead of Christ to make herself "fit."[117] Afraid that he was not fit to go to the Lord's table, Thomas Cooper was unsure how to prepare himself. He therefore sought a "book on the weekley preparation" and searched the scriptures for guidance.[118] Cooper later invited William Barber to attend sacrament with him at St. Lawrence Church. Barber, similarly concerned about his own fitness, initially declined, as he had a vague idea that some preparation was necessary. He found a "form" of preparation at home and began to follow it with his wife all week until Sunday morning.[119]

Methodist leaders not only offered (or imposed, depending on one's perspective) guidance concerning the content of one's devotional reading—they also encouraged particular practices of reading and interpretation. Literary scholar Brett McInelly observes that Methodism "provid[ed] a lens through which individuals interpreted the Bible, spiritual impressions, and their experiences, such as the meaning of affliction and persecution."[120] Among all of the reading material available to early Methodists, the Bible reigned as the incontrovertible source of truth and revelation. Laity turned to

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[117] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.
[118] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[119] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 20.
[120] Brett C. McInelly, *Textual Warfare and the Making of Methodism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35.

scriptures to verify what they heard and experienced in their lives. After hearing John Wesley preach on the need of a new heart, Sister Ibison turned to her Bible for confirmation of this concept. Upon finding it, she remarked, "then I sow that what there had tould me was troue."[121]

Methodists also frequently employed random selection of texts as a means of creating a space for divine intervention. In this way, one could more reliably be directed toward a passage particularly relevant to one's present spiritual condition. The text then stood a greater chance of being firmly incorporated into one's heart. Methodists often referred to texts or promises that were "applied" to their hearts with power.

Susannah Designe recounted that during her period of convictions she took her Bible, knelt down before God, and asked him for assurance that she "had an intrest in ye Blood of Christ." She then opened the book to the words, "know ye not that your Body is ye temple of ye Holy Ghost which is in you which ye have of God with a price therefore Glorifie God in your Body & in your Spirit which are Gods." She wrote, "this was ye first Scripture I ever took home to my own Soul; ye Lord applied it with power; it Seemed as if he talked with me face." According to her interpretation of the text, the "price" laid down for her guaranteed her reconciliation to God and assured her that God had given her a "measure of his Spirit." She would not, however, claim that the text was yet fulfilled in her "because ye Holy Ghose Dwelt not in [her]."[122] Even so, by leaving God the choice of text, she experienced a new kind of intimacy, "as if" God were speaking directly to her.

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[121] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[122] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.

Joan Webb also found comfort in reading texts opened to at random, such as Isaiah 41:8-15 and a chapter in one of John's epistles. She claimed, however, that she was unaware that she needed to "aply the promises to [her]self."[123] In the previous instance cited above, it is God who does the applying. Here, it seems that the reader has some responsibility to receive and accept the text personally. Interestingly, this could very well echo Methodist soteriology, in which both God and the individual have a role to play in the salvific process. Simply put, the individual is called to accept that which God offers. The vast majority of occurrences of the word "applying," however, referred to divine action rather than human reception.

Texts and promises applied

Early Methodists had texts and promises applied to their souls while reading and while hearing out-loud speech. William Holder, for instance, recalled having these words "strongly impressed on [his] mind" while listening to a prayer: "and having loved his own he loved them unto the end."[124] More frequently, however, Methodists wrote of texts and promises that materialized spontaneously in their minds without attributing the occurrence to a particular activity or cause. They simply stated that words or promises were applied. For them, the message itself was far more important than the means by which they apprehended it. Hannah Hancock presented her promises frankly in list form: "The promis applied to me was… The next promis applied to me was…"[125]

[123] Joan Webb to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 136.
[124] William Holder journal, 4 November 1768, Diaries Collection, MARC.
[125] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86.

A few Methodists received the same promises, likely texts they heard during sermons or through other Methodist media. For example, both Mary Thomas and Margarit Austin received the words, "Daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."[126] For the most part, however, the "applied" texts and subjects varied widely, from eternal life to forgiveness of sins to the second coming of Christ. Susannah Designe was enabled to give thanks to God after receiving the text, "Cast thy bread upon the waters and after many days thou shalt find it, and looking up to the Lord say what thanks shall I render unto O God for all thy mercies."[127] Joseph Humphreys found himself sealed with the promise, "In hopes of eternal life which God that cannot lie promised before the world began."[128] In an interesting interpretive maneuver, Hannah Hancock received God's love and kindness through the promise, "Thou art comly."[129] Many recall the intense feelings generated by the application of these texts. Through the "strong promises" applied to her, Elizabeth Downes received the full assurance of pardon along with a strong comfort "which [she] never could receive before."[130] Despite the peace, joy and assurance experienced by many, these impressions often faded quickly, or, perhaps more accurately, were obscured by competing voices.

Supernatural voices

For many early Methodists, their exuberant feelings were almost instantly replaced by those of doubt and confusion. Most attributed these doubts to Satan, who

[126] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128 and Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[127] Susannah Designe to Charles Wesley, 18 March 1742, EMV 51.
[128] Joseph Humphreys to Charles Wesley, 3 December 1741, EMV 89.
[129] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86.
[130] Elizabeth Downes to Charles Wesley, 13 April 1742, EMV 53.

was said to have attacked them with tempting thoughts, false doctrines and unbearable guilt. After her heartwarming experience, Hannah Hancock found herself "sorely beset" by "the enemy," who told her she had in fact received nothing from God.[131] James Flewit wrote that he was driven almost to despair with blasphemous and atheistic notions. He recalled that Satan tempted him to deny God's existence, sometimes telling him that if God did exist, he would surely not concern himself with Flewit. In this case, it seems that Flewit's experience in the Church of England also opened the door for Satan's devices: "What ministers I liked in the church I found their lives was so contrary to their doctrine that Satan would have often atempted me to believe that all religion was priestcraft."[132]

According to Martha Jones, Satan seemed to profit from the departure of John and Charles Wesley from the region. She recalled, "We were left as sheep without a shepard. Those who were left to guide us led us into strange paths." During this time, she was brought into "great confusion" and felt "destresed on every side." Satan brought upon her a storm of trouble, taunting, "Where is now thy God?"[133] In the case of Nathaniel Hurst, the devil found an entrance through Hurst's employer, who was a "carnal worldly man" and "a great hindrence in [Hurst's] progress." After being forbidden to attend a Methodist event one evening, Hurst became angry and had "words" with his employer. The "enemy" then rebuked him for having become angry, asking how he could possibly

[131] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86.
[132] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.
[133] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.

consider himself a child of God. The devil later continued throwing doubts his way, saying, "Do you not deceive yourself?"[134]

It is clear that for many of these early Methodists, the path toward salvation was strewn with obstacles. Not a few found themselves at one point or another searching for something that they were not sure to identify. They relied, therefore, on the guidance of Methodist leaders, the direction of supernatural voices and other media available to them. Under more stable circumstances, these resources may have sufficed to soothe troubled consciences and calm restless hearts and minds. The first few decades of Methodism, however, were rather turbulent. Preachers of varied temperaments and abilities came and went; printing presses produced both wholesome, instructional materials and morally questionable or objectionable entertainment; and Methodists themselves struggled with unstable and precarious family and vocational situations. Between conflicting public opinion concerning Methodism, the varied reactions of one's acquaintances, the intense scrutiny of one's own soul and the struggle to interpret forceful but fleeting feelings, Methodists sometimes felt themselves pulled in all directions. This is manifested clearly in the conflicting messages they received from both divine and demonic voices.

Mary Ramsay offered an excellent example of supernatural voices competing for her attention. One can imagine the devil perched on one shoulder, whispering insinuating remarks, while God rests on the other shoulder to counter this evil influence. She recounted:

> But many temptations came in between that wispered me in the ear and bade me "leave off, then you will get in business again as before." But the Lord would tell

[134] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15.

> me, on the other hand, "Think you that my blessing will sooner attend thee if thou leave off and go away? Well, but then the decever would tell me, "You have heard a great deal. Keep close to what you heard."[135]

Most early writers presented themselves as passive receptors of supernatural messages, Ramsay actively participated in the dialogue, arguing with the devil to convince him that she was not quite as bad as he believed her to be. After hearing John Wesley preach on Romans 7, she felt he described her temperament exactly. The devil asked skeptically, "There, are you justified, you that have so many evil tempers? No, surely you are not." Ramsay replied defiantly, "Well, I believe I am." She continued reasoning with him, saying, "Well, but I have not all those evil tempers now. Sometimes there is something stirs, but it don't reign in me." She conversed with God, as well, who tried to persuade her that her justification was not, in fact, a delusion.[136]

Despite the prominent place of "reason" within the theology of John Wesley, the verb "to reason" carried strongly negative connotations. In the context of these spiritual narratives, reasoning implied an underhanded negotiation, usually involving a degradation of one's faith. Writers often spoke of Satan's attempts to "reason" with them, which suggests the use of twisted logic to attack the fragile state of the newly converted. Early Methodists then turned to God and to their leaders for support. Margarit Austin wrote of the devil, "But still the Lord enabled me to withstand him, and I bid him go and ask Christ." To Charles Wesley she wrote, "And then you said all fear was of the devil. That strengthned me again, for I found that very true."[137]

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[135] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.

Early Methodists negotiated with supernatural voices in their search for the truth, and the messages they received had a very real effect upon them. Divine promises offered great comfort and joy, while Satan's temptations plunged them into doubt and despair. Elizabeth Hinsom recalled Satan telling her that she had lost Christ, and that she might as well hang herself. Fortunately, she wrote, God mercifully delivered her from this temptation.[138] Thomas Cooper experienced the same self-destructive temptation, along with several others: to curse God and Jesus, to believe that he already had cursed God and to call upon a different god. He wrote that these temptations caused him frequently to burst into tears, praying and crying aloud for mercy. Frightened by a voice whispering to him that the scriptures might not be true, he found himself "strugling betwixt these two sperits, not noing it was the sperit of God and the devil striven in me." It seems he found respite by retreating to the fields, "under egels or aney were to be in privit," and by hearing the word at society meetings. These practices enabled him to resist the devil and to be delivered from his temptations.[139]

Holy conversation

Early Methodists did not only keep an ear out for divine voices. They also sought human company and conversation. For many, honest spiritual discourse was a precious source of refreshment, whether between two people or in an intimate group setting. William Holder recalled spending two hours of "close fellowship" with Mr. Valton, whom he was meeting for the first time. Of this moving experience he wrote:

[138] Elizabeth Hinsom to Charles Wesley, 25 May 1740, EMV 2.
[139] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.

> We found great freedom to speak our minds to each other, and our hearts were so knit together that each could have put the other in his bosom, tho' had not seen each other before. Does not this prove the peculiarity of the love of God, and also how greatly the Lord is delighted in the communion of his people, for what beside could have knitt us so together?[140]

A month later, he met with a few people "to tell the travail of our souls." He rejoiced, "It was an exceeding precious opportunity, my soul overflow'd with love, I was as a little child. Oh amazing love!"[141] Similarly, Margarit Austin recalled her first band meeting: "And the first night we met, hearing the other tell the state of ~~my~~ their souls, it was of much strength to me to speak of the state of mine."[142] Her unconscious error reveals the deep intimacy of this communion; in hearing others speak of the condition their souls, she found a striking resonance with that of her own.

For not a few Methodists, honest spiritual discourse was a rare and sought-after privilege. As Phyllis Mack notes, some early writers struggle with isolation due to work-related moves, abandonment or neglect.[143] Margarit Austin, for instance, had been abandoned by an abusive husband.[144] Others left their families for apprenticeships or other work opportunities. A number of writers lamented that they had no one with whom they could speak their minds.[145] For these Methodists, this lack of spiritual companionship had serious consequences, not only for their social well-being, but also for their personal salvation. An anonymous correspondent of Charles Wesley recalled,

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[140] William Holder journal, 13 October 1768, Diaries Collection, MARC.
[141] Ibid., 25 November 1768, Diaries Collection, MARC.
[142] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[143] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 75.
[144] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[145] "I was not acquanted with any that I could tell my mind to." Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.

"[I had] no one to Shew me How I Should escape ye Dangers of that Destruction I believed I Should be plunged into if I Dyed. No one asked me ye State of my Soul."[146]

From the spiritual narratives and other letters and journals, it seems that Methodism itself also contributed to the loneliness of these writers. For instance, the itineracy of Methodist leadership meant that lay people could not develop long-term, in-person relationships with beloved preachers under whom they were converted. Thomas Cooper complained to Charles Wesley, "And it hapned at that time that you and Mr. John were out of town, and I had nobody to declair my mind to."[147] Similarly, Mary Guy lamented, "I have no friend left in Bristol to converse with nor comfort me with reguard to my soul… Oh that I were with you. I often look toward Charles Street and think on you and dear Mrs. Wesley, and tho I cannot see you waking yet when I am sleeping, my spirit frequently wandring to you and conversing with you."[148]

After associating themselves with Methodism, many writers subsequently encountered the rejection of their friends, families and employers. James Flewit found himself "att a great loss to finde a spiritual friend" after being awakened, as all his relations were "strangers to the work of God" and surprised at his "alteration." From this time, he "abhord all company & lovd to be in lonesom places by [him]self."[149] J. Okely's master forbade him from having contact with Methodists. He wrote sorrowfully to

[146] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.
[147] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[148] Mary Guy, 14 January 1786, EMV 69.
[149] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.

William Seward, "I have no body here to converse with at my leisure… so I am always by my self."[150]

In these circumstances, many relied on letters to continue the dialogue of their souls. Though they longed for face-to-face contact, many early writers found real comfort in written correspondence. Okely entreated William Seward to write him soon, "that it may be to the refreshment of my (I hope) hungry soul."[151] Though the two had never met in person, Howell Griffith found himself united in spirit to Seward by the "bonds of love" manifested through letters.[152] Through the post, it was evidently possible to evoke a genuinely sympathetic and pastoral presence. In 1752, an unnamed author wrote to encourage a woman who felt herself alone:

> When I read your letters, it puts me in mind of the time when I was myself solitary, anxious to come up to the descriptions given of a Christian; and to attain a certainty for my heart: and without any friend in the mean-while to advise with. This may seem a hard situation, but in reality it is not: for our dear Savior is at such times very near, and feeds us with hidden manna, teaches us wisdom secretly, even the wisdom of believing in him with our whole heart: nor would the intermeddling with any one else be of much service.[153]

Though the structure of Methodism was created to encourage sincere and frank conversation amongst individuals and in small, close-knit groups, not everyone was admitted instantly to bands and societies. Some wrote of their discouragement after Methodist leaders (notably John Wesley) or other laity took no notice of them at first. Others were disappointed at having to wait for admission into a particular society. After beginning to frequent church and sacrament, Taverner Wallis noticed that his former

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[150] J. Okely to William Seward, 23 November 1738, DDSe 4, MARC.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Howell Griffith to William Seward, DDSe 47.
[153] Unnamed male to unnamed female, 1752, DPr 1/88, MARC.

acquaintances avoided him. Having "no one to speak [his] mind to," he sought the company of Methodists, figuring that the best way to become good was to associate with good people.[154] After several satisfactory visits to the Fetter Lane society, he asked Mr. Bray to be admitted. His request was refused, as he was not acquainted with any particular member who could recommend him. For the next two years, he rarely attended the society and lapsed back into sin and fear of death. Eventually, he met a Methodist woman who proposed him to John Wesley by letter. These written accounts testify to those who persevered to become Methodists. What it not known is how many left off permanently, having encountered these obstacles.

Word of mouth

In the early spiritual accounts, one can see clearly the importance of word of mouth in promoting Methodist activities. Many writers recounted in detail the conversations in which they first encountered evangelical religion. Joseph Carter was first encouraged to attend a religious society meeting, it seems, while receiving a haircut. His barber mentioned the existence of several societies, including his own in Miles Lane, and Carter subsequently joined him soon after. Later, while doing wainscoting work on a house in Little Britain, Carter had a chance encounter with Mr. Bray's errand boy who introduced him to Methodism. Carter almost seemed to glory in telling the tale. After the errand boy announced his intention to hear the Wesleys preach, Carter replied:

> "But I will tell you my belief," said I, pharise-like with my arms folded together, swaggering as it were. "I believe in all the articles of the religion (& I believe at that time I never had read them all over, nor hardly knew what was in them). Likewise, I believe in the scriptures of the old and new testament, in all the

[154] Taverner Wallis to Charles Wesley, 24 November 1741, EMV 19.

> creeds, &c." He asked me if my belief influnc'd all my life & actions? I told him no, I did not find that it did. He told me then that my faith was that of the head, & not of the heart… He struck me all of a heap. I could not tell what to say.[155]

In some instances, one can see influences among the writers themselves. Encouraged by an acquaintance from the pub, Thomas Cooper began attending St. Lawrence's Church on Sunday morning.[156] He later encountered William Barber at work, who wrote in his own narrative that Cooper had testified to what God had done in his soul. Cooper subsequently invited Barber to join him at the Fetter Lane society and at St. Lawrence's Church for service and sacrament. Barber then recruited his wife to begin preparing for sacrament using a printed manual.[157] Twenty years later, Barber was still an active Methodist, as demonstrated by his correspondence with Charles Wesley.[158]

Closing reflections

This chapter has examined a number of media by which early Methodists received and transmitted messages during the evangelical conversion process. It has attempted to do justice to the voices of lay writers by offering them space to speak, and by (re)defining media categories according to evidence provided in the lay narratives. The investigation of individual Methodist media reveals the seriousness with which early Methodists considered phenomena such as emotional utterances, random selection of biblical texts, the reception of supernatural voices, and spiritual conversation.[159] It also offers insight

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[155] Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 17.
[156] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[157] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 20.
[158] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 27 December 1762, EMV 23.
[159] Visions and visual language are also quite prominent in the lay narratives. These will be treated separately in the third chapter.

into lay perspectives on the presence, preaching and publications (broadly speaking) of their leaders.

The cumulative effect of these media, however, well exceeds the sum of its parts. Most impressive is the manner in which the media reinforce one other. Within a single narrative, one can easily find mention of one medium leading seamlessly to another. For instance, it was through random selection of a page in a book (blessed by God) that Naomi Thomas was enabled to call upon the Lord "in a broken way."[160] Within a single paragraph, Elizabeth Sais cycled through hearing religious discourse, having a text applied to her, being enabled to testify, reasoning with the devil, and being moved by a hymn to declare God's mercies.[161]

This dynamic complicates the traditional binary between print and oratory. For example, George Homer Williams treats print and oratory primarily as vehicles for receiving sermons. He argues that printed sermons served to reinforce the ephemeral nature of the spoken word.[162] It would seem from the narratives, however, that the early Methodists had no trouble remembering key texts and phrases from sermons, readings and hymns. The value of printed sermons, then, rested not only on their reinforcement of the spoken version (and it seems that the texts often differed significantly from what was actually preached); far from an inferior version of the lived experience, printed sermons had the capacity to instigate a transformative experience, to throw the reader into convictions or to remove doubts in an instant.

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[160] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.
[161] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[162] Williams, "'The Word Came with Power.'"

Taken together, these Methodist media formed a dialogical storm in which early lay people felt themselves tossed and turned. At the same time, they added their voices to the dialogue as they struggled to navigate their oftentimes conflicting experiences. The following chapter will treat the construction of the spiritual narratives themselves, examining how lay writers chose to interpret and express their conversion experiences on paper.

CHAPTER TWO

EDITING THE SELF

"The life of the Christian is rather via (journey) than vita (life),
a step towards life rather than life."[163]

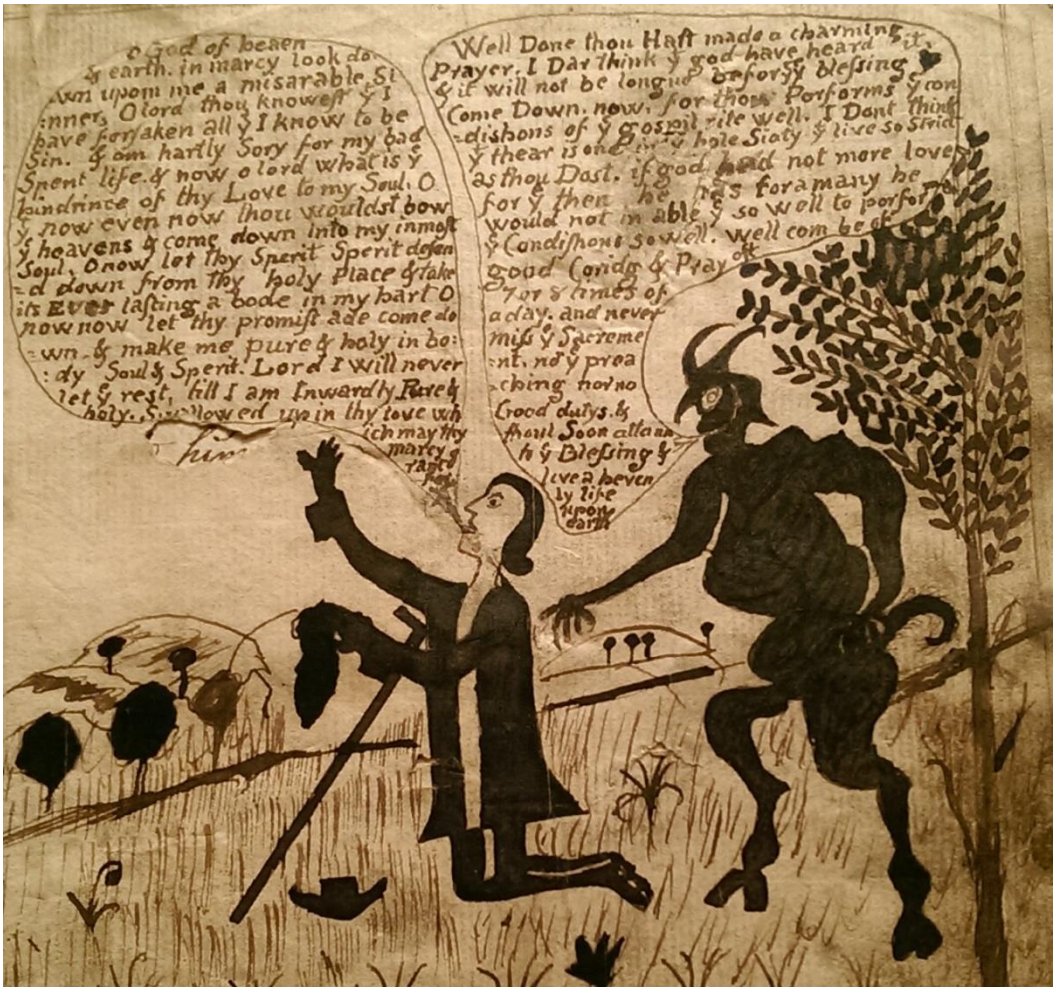

Fig. 2 Devil tempting a Methodist with false assurance of holiness

Man: "O God of heaen [sic] & earth. In marcy look down upon me a miserable sinner, O lord thou knowest yt I have forsaken all yt I know to be sin. & am hartly Sory for my bad Spent life. & now o lord what is ye hindrince of thy Love to my Soul. O yt now even

[163] Thomas Brooks, "Epistle to the saints," *Heaven on earth*, n.p., quoted in Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality," *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (March 1996), 56.

now thou wouldst bow ye heavens & come down into my inmost Soul. O now let thy Sperit Sperit [sic] desend down from thy holy Place & take its ever lasting a bode in my hart. O now now let thy promist ade come down & make me pure & holy in body Soul & Sperit. Lord I will never let ye rest, till I am Inwardly Pure & holy. Swallowed up in thy love which may thy marcy grant now."

Devil: "Well Done thou Hast made a charming Prayer. I Dar think yt god have heard it, & it will not be long before ye blessing Come Down, now, for thou Porforms ye condishons of ye gospel rite well. I Don't think thear is one in ye hole Siaty yt live so strict as thou Dost. if god had not more love for ye then he has for a many he would not in able ye so well to perform ye Condishons so well. Well com be of good [illegible] & Pray oft 7 or 8 times of a day. and never miss ye Sacrement and ye preaching nor no Good dutys & thoul Soon attain to ye Blessing & leve a hevenly life upon ye earth."

Introduction

The writings of the first Methodist lay people often give the impression that Methodism was a very noisy affair. Within the context of public preaching events, people wept aloud, shouted and otherwise created a ruckus in expressing both joy and despair. Some of this noise was indeed audible, while some of the noise occurred internally and/or metaphorically. We read of Methodists exclaiming things to themselves and "groaning" to God for deliverance. One almost gets the sense that to be a good Methodist, one must be a noisy Methodist—at least at first. Typical "symptoms" of spiritual transformation include exclamations first of despair and then of praise, involuntary utterances, and a compulsion to articulate those experiences to others.

We read of Methodists who were bubbling over with speech and sound following their conversions, but we also read of Methodists struggling to express what was happening to them. Moreover, these experiences were not necessarily mutually exclusive. A person might find herself proclaiming her salvation to the world at one moment, but hesitant to make a peep at the next. Methodist lay people, both women and

men, wrote of both the temptation to keep their experiences to themselves, as well as a strong reluctance to put their experiences on paper. What accounts for this tension between speaking and keeping silent? This chapter examines the necessity and challenge of sharing one's salvation. It explores lay experience as presented in spiritual narratives, but also turns attention to the experience of writing the narratives themselves. What helped and hindered evangelical expression?

Constrained to speak, compelled to keep silent

Prior to conversion, many Methodists felt their hearts to be "cold," "stony" or "dead." They expressed an inability both to feel and to speak. Mary Ramsay recalled a time when she found herself incapable of singing alone:

> But still I was the same, hard as a stone, so that when I was alone, I could not so much as sing a hymn. Here was one that I indeed used to sing, that is a hymn calld "the method," that I thought suited me very well. But att last I could not sing none except when I was among some of the brethren or hearing the word. But when I was att home, by my self, I could not sing att all. If I offerd to sing, I could not tell what to sing. There was nothing I could see that was fit for me. Sometimes I could not open my mouth. I was just as if I had been a sleep.[164]

During his time of convictions, James Flewit was so terrified as to be rendered speechless for a while. Eventually, God gave him "utterrance," enabling him to say the Lord's Prayer.[165]

The early Methodist conversion process was characterized by moments of intense exposure and vulnerability. One was often confronted by the sight (literal or metaphorical) of one's "vile self."[166] At this stage, shame overwhelmed many, making

[164] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[165] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.
[166] This will be addressed further in Chapter Three.

them afraid to speak to others of their spiritual condition. Naomi Thomas recalled being unable to express what she felt at the time. She wrote, "I went on for a long time in doubts and fears and without any hope, neither could I tell my condition to any person. But still I was ashamed of my own vileness, which made my burthen yet heavier."[167] Upon hearing from Charles Wesley's preaching that she was the greatest sinner that ever lived, Sister Ibison would have declared her state to the crowd if not for the presence of her husband. She wrote, "but it cam into my soul what will my husbon think, that I have been some vile woman."[168]

In the case of Thomas Cooper, his hesitation stemmed from a skepticism concerning Methodist doctrine. After having heard Charles Wesley preach on the need to feel forgiveness, Cooper struggled to believe that it was possible (or biblically sound) to proclaim that one's sins had been forgiven. He wrote, "I was almost a fraid to ask [God], for I thought I should speack blasfemey if I should say my sins were forgiven mee." After searching the scriptures and "strugling betwixt… the sperit of God and the devil striven in [him]," Cooper eventually accepted the possibility and necessity of assurance of forgiveness.[169]

As one's conversion to evangelical Christianity required conscious assent to evangelical ideas, the spread of evangelical Christianity depended upon persuasion and promulgation of a message. Once one had received and accepted a message of salvation, one was obliged to pass it on. After receiving the witness of the Spirit, Samuel Webb

[167] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.
[168] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[169] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.

"thought it [his] duty to invite all men to seek the Lord."[170] Immediately after his first joyful experience, Thomas Cooper returned home to share with Sister Potes what the Lord had done for his soul and to exhort her to "seek the Lord" and "not to be so careful after the things of this world."[171] William Barber, by contrast, lamented that he neglected his duty when he visited his friends in the country, "nott to do the Lord's will butt my own, for I did nott confess the Lord befor them, nor did I declare whatt the Lord had done for my soul." For this reason, he claimed, the Lord withdrew from him, and he prayed his disobedience might be "laid to [his] charge."[172]

For many Methodists, however, this duty was not only a welcome task, but even an involuntary and unstoppable impulse. Elizabeth Vandome found her heart "filled with love for all." She exclaimed, "O that I could but perswade all to embrace him. God has given me to feel in a measure how he so loved us as to give his life a ransom for all, for methinks I could lay down my life for any soul."[173] Sister Ibison, finding her evangelical sensitivity much enhanced, "prayed for all" and "wept to see so many [spiritually] dead people in the streets. I could hardly get home with out telling them so."[174]

This double desire to share one's own experience and to participate in the salvation of others helped some to overcome their inhibitions about speaking. Sarah Middleton remarked, "I find I gather strength daily for I usd to be a fraid to Speak to my carnal relations what god had done for my soul, but now I find I am constraind to speak tho I know they will cast me out as a byword & a Proverb of reproach." Similarly,

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[170] Samuel Webb to Charles Wesley, 20 November 1741, EMV 18.
[171] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[172] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 20.
[173] Elizabeth Vandome to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 131.
[174] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.

Thomas Cooper continued to speak out despite criticism: "Some tould me I was mad. Others tould me the devil was in me, but I did not mind that, for I spake so much the more." His "love to all the world" urged him to declare God's work in his soul so "that they might feel the same."[175]

Methodists had more to fear than mere criticism. Some were harassed or disowned by their friends and families, as Sarah Middleton predicted for herself above. Others lost their employment. Mary Ramsay, a teacher, recalled that parents stopped sending her students once they learned that she had turned Methodist.[176] Though not recounted in the narratives examined here, Methodists also met with mob violence and other disruptions during preaching events and other meetings.[177] Charles Wesley's journal is filled with narrow escapes from angry crowds pelting anything and everything from vegetables to "stones of many pounds' weight,"[178] occasionally setting fire to homes and other buildings where Methodists gathered. Even so, more than a few Methodists found themselves "constrained to speak," unable to resist even if they had tried. For many such as these, the experience of conversion coincided with a renewed and enhanced ability to express oneself—an awakening of the senses. For Thomas Cooper, it was as if someone else was speaking through him:

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[175] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[176] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[177] See, for example, John Walsh, "Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century" in *Studies in Church History* 8, *Popular Belief and Practice*, eds. G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 213.
[178] "One of our sisters complained to the mayor of some who had thrown into her house stones of many pounds' weight, which fell on the pillow within a few inches of her sucking child. The magistrate damned her, and said, 'You shall have no justice here. You see there is none for you at London, or you would have got it before now.' With this saying he drove her out of his house." CWJ, vol. 2, 25 July 1744, 412.

> And wen I have ben wacking in a morning, I have heard such words of prayer and prasis come out of my mouth befour I was awackened to me remember wat they were but wen I came to be wide a wack, they were as far tackin from me as if I never had heard them. And I beleve to this day they were words not for mortol man to experes with aney bodey. I could not help brecking out into praisis, for I found it gave me eas. And now I found love to all the world and could not help declaring to all I met with wat the Lord had done for my soul, that they might feel the same.[179]

These words of "prayer and prasis" could not be contained by the body. This supernatural experience engendered an altruism that enabled him to evangelize openly without fear of consequences. One gets the impression it would have been harder for him to have suppressed the message.

Shortly after his evangelical conversion, Benjamin Seward wrote to Charles Wesley concerning an experience in which he was given speech. He attended a society meeting feeling "low and weak," expecting that he would not be able to say much. He recounted that God was pleased to "loosen [his] Stammering Tongue in so wonderful a Manner" that he not only testified to his conversion, but also expounded on two texts to which he opened "so Remarkably." He recalled being "furnish'd with such a Supply of Words and Matter" that he was able to speak "without the least Hesitation." This he interpreted as nothing short of a miracle, since he had never before spoken in that manner.[180] Charles Wesley underlined the divine origins of this irresistible impulse as he reflected on an experience of preaching in the streets: "The word ran very swiftly. When God gives it, who can hinder its course?"[181]

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[179] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[180] Benjamin Seward to Charles Wesley, 8 September 1739, DDPr 1/97.
[181] CWJ, vol. 2, 22 July 1744 , 410.

Despite the intense joy of the newly-converted state, Methodists remained acutely aware of their critics, both internal and external. Between mob violence, public mockery, the concerns of family, employers and other acquaintances, Methodists had not a little to consider when sharing their religious experiences with others. One not only hesitated to reveal one's damned condition to the world, but one also frequently had trouble communicating one's salvific revelations.

Many wrote that immediately following an experience of justification, the devil tempted them to keep quiet and to not speak of their feelings. For instance, the devil convinced Thomas Cooper that in speaking of what God had done in his soul, he had offended God. In spite of his hesitations, Cooper spoke of his fears to John Wesley, who instantly identified them as a temptation of the devil. John reassured Cooper, telling him he "might keep the secrites of an earthley king, but not of the heavenly, for [he] did right to declaire it on the house top."[182]

Though fortunate enough to have had two heart-warming experiences in one day, Sarah Barber found her mouth "Stopt" by Satan after one instance. After receiving a vision of Christ crucified and hearing the voice of God, she was thrown into such doubts that she "had not Power to Speak of it to any." Later that night during a prayer meeting, she received another "gift of Faith." Though moved to testify aloud, she was again prevented by Satan's whisperings. It seems that several other women had also testified to receiving the same gift that evening. Barber worried that in speaking out, she would be perceived as merely attempting to follow the crowd. After the meeting was over, she

[182] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.

spoke to Sister Robinson about her experience. Sister Robinson affirmed that Barber had been justified and expressed regret that Barber had not been able to speak out.[183]

While some doubts may be attributed to one's own uncertainty concerning the nature and authenticity of his or her spiritual experience, others stemmed from fear of public opinion. Women in particular found it difficult and intimidating to share with their male leaders, however insistently they might attribute their fear to the devil. Sarah Middleton recounted that despite wanting the whole world to experience the love that was overflowing her heart, she was much tempted to keep it to herself and not to tell John Wesley about God's work in her life.[184] Other women also wrote to Charles of their hesitation to speak with John. The fact that he apparently ignored several women who were trying to work up enough courage to speak to him may account for some of this reluctance. Mrs. Plat recounted that John Wesley took no notice of her, "which troubled me very much & mad me think that all the enemy said unto me to be true, for he presented nothing before mine eyes but the pit of hell, nor nothing could I behold but an angory God whom I had justly offended."[185]

After experiencing inexpressible power in her soul, Martha Jones confided in Brother Thompson, who told her he would share her experience with John Wesley. After a meeting the following Sunday night, Thompson announced to Jones that John Wesley wished to speak with her. She recalled:

> When I heard this I was so terrified by satun that I trembled exceedingly and begun to doubt. I thought I heard the devil say, "Do not dare to tell this lie. You

[183] Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 7.
[184] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5.
[185] Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10.

> were not justified." Mr. Wesly was now come. I told him as well as I could what God had done for my soul and was much strenghend by what he said. After this, the devil left me, and my faith increased.[186]

The thread running through these stories of doubt and hesitation is guilt. Many seemed caught between the impulse and obligation to speak out, and their fears of seeming presumptuous or disingenuous. Despite being encouraged to speak, many found the task vexingly problematic. While gender-separate meetings encouraged women to speak out in a setting with reduced social pressures, this did not always reduce all hesitation, as demonstrated by Sarah Barber's experience recounted above.

By contrast, Margarit Austin initially felt quite comfortable speaking of her spiritual state. Whether the difference lay in Austin herself or the fact that she was speaking with Charles instead of John cannot be determined. What is more clear is that other women noticed her familiarity with Charles and rebuked her for it. She wrote, "one of my sisters in the band told me that my coming to you was self and did me much harm." This reproach was enough to throw her into serious doubts, and she began to think that every thought and joy she experienced was "self." The next time she heard Charles preach, Satan "prest the word 'self' to [her]… insomuch that [she] wisht the ground would open to swallow [her] up." Eventually, God was pleased to comfort her again and to assure her that she was "clear before God by the blood of his Son."[187] While it was problematic to keep silent and to deprive the world of one's experience, it was also problematic to speak out. It appear that the word "self" is a key term in this predicament.

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[186] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.
[187] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.

The concept of the self will be explored further in relation to the task of writing one's experience.

Written narratives

Many of the patterns of restrained and unrestrained speech also translate to the page. A few Methodists, in the ardor of their "first love," felt compelled to write to Charles Wesley in order to relate the good news of their evangelical conversion and to declare their gratitude for Charles's role in the process. Elizabeth Bristow, for instance, began her correspondence: "I cannot help letting you know the comfortable work the Lord began, he carrys on. He hath shewed me you are a minister of his own sending." The rest of her narrative functions as an unabashed proclamation of the radical transformation wrought in her heart. Bristow declared that she was not ashamed to speak, and she challenged those who might object: "Shall I dare to hide this, shall I not declare what the Lord hath done for me? God for bid."[188]

It was not uncommon for Methodists to write spontaneously to their leaders, impulsively in the wake of a particularly intense experience. Early Methodist correspondence is peppered with these pungent morsels of spiritual zeal, often written out of the ardor of one's "first love." It was much more rare, however, for someone to voluntarily submit a *formal* account of one's conversion. One can glean snippets of spiritual experience from ordinary correspondence with the Wesleys and other Methodist leaders, but an unsolicited, carefully composed spiritual narrative was almost unheard of. William Turner serves as an exception. He claimed to have written his account in 1756

[188] Elizabeth Bristow to Charles Wesley, 12 April 1740, EMV 11.

out of a sense of duty, feeling "it incumbent on me to make known the manner of my being convinced of sins, and the manner of my small progress in the divine life." He supposed Charles seldom heard of such instances.[189] The vast majority of accounts, however, were written upon request.

In the early 1740s, Charles Wesley solicited written, spiritual accounts from individuals in the Methodist societies at Bristol and London. Though the bulk of accounts were written between the years 1739 and 1741, a few date significantly later. Mary Maddern responded in 1762, "At your request, I am going to give you a fue perticulars of God's dealings with me, a poor unworthy creature."[190] Repetition of wording in the responses offers clues to Charles's original appeals. Most striking is the similarity among the introductions of Elizabeth Halfpenny, Elizabeth Sais and Naomi Thomas:

> According to your desire, I have given you as full account of the state of my soul at present, and also of some of my former life, as I thought would be proper to mention, and as it now occurs to my mind.[191]
>
> According to your desire, I have endeavoured to give you as full account of the state of my soul at present, and also of some part of my former life as I thought would be proper, as it does at present occur to my mind.[192]
>
> I have given you as full account of the state of my soul at present, and also of some of my former life as I thought would be necessary, as it now comes into my mind.[193]

Most offered an abbreviated version of the above, demonstrating compliance by showing the present state and past workings of God in their souls. Sister Ibison frankly declared,

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[189] William Turner to Charles Wesley, 9 March 1756, EMV 130.
[190] Mary Maddern to Charles Wesley, 29 June, 1762, EMV 105.
[191] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.
[192] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[193] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.

"This is what God hath dun for my soul."[194] Sarah Middleton, however, found motivation in her pre-conversion life: "I writ these lines to let you know what a pharisee I was."[195] A few, such as Mariah Price, demonstrated an additional impulse to recount Charles's participation in their spiritual evolution, as well as to declare their loyalty to Charles as his spiritual children: "My dear father in God, I now declare unto you with a joyfull heart as well as I can remember how the Lord worked in my soul by you, my own father."[196] The scarcity of the term "conversion" among Methodist leaders is mirrored here in the vocabulary of the lay writers. Sarah Barber is a rare example among the early writers: "Att your Request: I here as far as the Lord gives me knowledge to see & know my Conversion."[197]

For some, the opportunity to write of their souls was pleasantly welcome. Sarah Crosby, for instance, responded that "your desire lays me under the blessed necessity of recollecting past mercies."[198] For many others, however, the request was met with a reluctance that went beyond humility. Not a few narratives are framed by apologies or polite excuses. Sometimes these take a lightly deferential tone, acknowledging Charles's request and perhaps confessing one's limited writing abilities. Katharine Gilbert, for example, declared her humility and seemingly begged pardon for her boldness in writing.[199] Bell Hutchinson spoke of her "poor, imperfect prayers," referencing her

[194] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[195] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5.
[196] Mariah Price to Charles Wesley, 18 May 1740, EMV 12.
[197] Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 7.
[198] Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, vol. 2, 26.
[199] Katharine Gilbert to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 6.

continuing efforts to master the English language.[200] Nathaniel Hurst confessed to Charles, "since you asked us, I have been at a stand about writing to you and have been troubled a little, for some times it comes to me that I have nothing to say."[201]

Thus far, these remarks could safely be attributed to politeness and a certain degree of discomfort with the activity of writing itself. But others went further, demonstrating a stronger resistance and unwillingness. John Walsh's obsessive perfectionism led him to estimate that his account of the Lord's dealings with him could take up to seven years to finish, but for Charles's sake, he would try to hurry things along.[202] Elizabeth Bristow declared that had she not been asked, she would not have taken the liberty to write. And yet, she recounted numerous moments in which she could not help but speak and testify, proudly declaring she is not ashamed to speak.[203] Martha Jones stated clearly that she had written "much against [her] will." She attributed her unwillingness to her fear of seeming ignorant, and with crushing humility ascribed whatever ability she had to God:

> I should have been very glad if I had been excused from this task and was in hopes you would forget to ask me for it again. I knew it was my duty to obey you as my spiritual pastor, but in this I thought I could not indeed. It was a secret pride in my heart wich made me so unwilin. I knew my incapacity to write any thing of this kind as it ought and was loth to have my ignorance discovered.[204]

Even with those for whom language and literacy were not stumbling blocks, something about the exercise was still problematic. Scholars who have examined women's narratives published later in the *Arminian Magazine* also observe some

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[200] Bell Hutchinson to Charles Wesley, 30 January 1755, EMV 74.
[201] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15.
[202] John Walsh to Charles Wesley, 11 August 1762, EMV 134
[203] Elizabeth Bristow to Charles Wesley, 12 April 1740, EMV 11.
[204] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.

hesitations, but they often attribute them to lack of confidence resulting from the pressures of a male-dominated society.[205] They then applaud those bold women who throw caution to the wind, ignoring gender barriers to follow that irresistible call to proclaim what God has done in their lives. These earlier narratives, however, tell a slightly different story. While some did gladly embrace the request, there were plenty of others—both women and men—for whom the task of writing a spiritual account was difficult and undesirable, for whom Charles's request was not a liberating opportunity but rather an unpleasant and unwelcomed chore. If one cannot point solely to politeness, gender or literacy level as possible causes, what accounts for this resistance?

Thomas Hanson, a Methodist preacher whose account was published in the *Arminian Magazine*, offers a clue. He confessed in his very first sentence, "It is very difficult to write where self is concerned."[206] For him, the problem lay not in the activity of writing, but in writing about himself. I suspect that this discomfort with presenting the self was at the root of the problem for his predecessors, as well. Indeed, his concern about writing echoed the fears of Margarit Austin in relation to "self" and oral testimony, as well as of others who hesitated to share aloud. The remainder of this chapter will explore this dilemma of putting the self on the page, considering early Methodist

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[205] "The fact that [John] Wesley recognized that his lay members might have legitimate fears about their writing abilities also indicates the extent to which the lay membership that corresponded with Wesley and contributed to the *Arminian Magazine* was far from culturally elite. This is an especially prevalent subtext of the accounts by women in the magazine, who are both unsure of their abilities as writers and their role within the Methodist public conversation." Andrew O. Winckles, "Drawn out in Love,"145.

[206] "It is very difficult to write where self is concerned. But as I am requested, I shall endeavour to give a brief account of those circumstances in my life which particularly discover the divine pity towards me." John Telford, *Wesley's Veterans: Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told by Themselves,* vol. 4 (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1912), 223.

conceptions of the self and how that self is formed and challenged by the experience of writing.

Methodists were certainly not the first to write of their spiritual experiences. Unlike for some of their ancestors in faith, however, such as the Puritans, the writing of conversion narratives was not an integral spiritual discipline for most Methodists, and it was never required of society members. This may have been due to the illiterate and semi-literate status of many members. Certain persons, however, were encouraged to write conversion accounts. John Wesley requested this of his preachers and selected others, particularly later in the 1770s and 1780s with the goal of publishing them in the *Arminian Magazine*, the best-known source of Methodist spiritual narrative. At the time that Charles Wesley solicited his spiritual accounts, however, it was never something the average Methodist would have expected to do. Indeed, the written experiences of ordinary people were as yet a novelty.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the criteria for a life to appear in print seemed to be roughly these: one must be extremely good or extremely bad, in any case extremely interesting, and in most cases, dead. The kind of "life" most commonly circulated was the pious or eminent life, accounts of saintly persons that served to inspire goodness and godliness. Prominent examples include Foxe's *Book of Martyrs,* which retained its popularity for centuries, and Samuel Clark's *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons*, both of which contributed to John Wesley's *Christian Library*.[207] Isabel Rivers points out that even though John Wesley included a number of lay people in his *Christian*

[207] The *Christian Library* was a collection of abridged, edited and republished works that John Wesley assembled in fifty volumes for the edification of Methodists.

Library, only a few attained any degree of popularity. The new trend of biographical dictionaries further stressed the criterion of eminence in the church, as well as in the military, in politics and in academia.[208]

In the first few decades of Methodism, most of the popular religious magazines had not yet appeared: the already-mentioned *Arminian Magazine*, but also the *Gospel Magazine*, the *Evangelical Magazine*, the *Christian Observer*, and the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine.*[209] Even after they did appear on the scene, very few of them included examples of living persons. Of those accounts of still-living persons that were published, laity did not typically figure among the most popular.[210] Andrew Winckles points out that it was not considered in good taste to publish a life-in-progress, as it was still susceptible to making mistakes.[211] To publish one's own life was to display the utmost presumption. Such an act was not to be undertaken except in the most extreme of circumstances and with "profuse apologies" for "breach of proper practice."[212] As one scholar remarks about George Whitefield's memoir, "Who…but an egotist of the first order would publish his autobiography at the age of twenty-six?"[213]

These observations may partially explain the reticence of people to write of their lives in the middle of them. First, it was too early for one's life to be revealed in print. Second, it would be "self" indeed to presume that one was important enough to edify

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[208] Isabel Rivers, "John Wesley and Religious Biography." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 85 (2003), 212.
[209] See ibid. for a list of religious magazines in print in the late eighteenth century.
[210] Ibid., 220.
[211] Winckles, "Drawn out in Love," 142.
[212] Michael Mascuch, *The Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 3.
[213] James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 180.

others with one's life story. For women, there would have been double pressure, as it was still unusual for women to publish religious texts. Historian Cynthia Aalder writes about the reluctance of Baptist hymn writer Anne Steele to publish her work, despite her habit of sharing her poetry with friends and family.[214]

If the novelty partially explains resistance to writing, it also may explain eager receptivity to reading and hearing first-person narratives. Methodist leaders and lay people alike remarked on the captivating potency of first-person accounts from living people. There was a freshness and an immediacy that stirred their sentiments, an intimacy that drew them into relationship with the writer. It was hoped by Methodist leaders that the sharing of religious experience would beget experience. Thomas Haliburton, a Puritan whose life John Wesley included in his *Christian Library*, wrote of the importance of sharing narratives: "For the work of God in all is, as to the substance, the same and uniform; and as a face answers to face in a glass, so does one Christian's experience answer to another's; and both to the word of God."[215] Similarly, Charles Wesley hoped that hearers might recognize their own experiences in biblical stories, identifying with the characters while simultaneously gaining new insights into their own lives. He preached on the Pharisee and the publican in 1743: "In this parable, as in a glass, may every person here present see himself."[216] This concept of text as mirror was not uncommon among religious writers; indeed, the language of seeing the self was quite prevalent among early Methodist writers. This visual language will be addressed more

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[214] Cynthia Y. Aalders, *To Express the Ineffable: The Hymns and Spirituality of Anne Steele* (Milton Keynes and Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008), 23.
[215] Quoted in Isabel Rivers "'Strangers and Pilgrims': Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative," in *Augustan Worlds*, eds. J. C. Hilson et al. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 195.
[216] CWS, 270.

fully in the following chapter. For the moment, it suffices to say that in reading and hearing the stories of ordinary contemporaries, early Methodists drew comfort and encouragement from the similarities of their experiences.[217]

Early Methodists were deeply moved by the written experiences of their leaders, as noted in the previous chapter. The idea of producing their own accounts, however, proved much more challenging, as the notion of putting one's own life on paper infringed upon current conceptions of the self and the nature of autobiography.

Negotiating the Methodist self

Within evangelicalism, there existed an individualistic tendency: Jesus died not for a faceless humanity, but for each individual person. Consequently, one's salvation experience must be uniquely personal. Methodist media—hymns, sermons, tracts—are filled with the language of "I" and "me." Within the conversion experience, one accepted a personal relationship with Jesus, a savior who knew them by name. In this sense, the fact of being a particular someone was essential. Early writers recounted specific details that distinguished their conversions from those of others. They recalled mystical experiences in which Jesus spoke directly to "me," in which hymns and sermons seemed expressly intended for "me," in which the eye of the preacher was fixed intently on "me."

As part of retelling one's conversion story, one also had to claim one's place as a subject within the larger narrative—first as protagonist who errs, then as a flawed being who is redeemed by the savior, then as storyteller of that salvific experience. Historian Adam Fox observes that early Methodists in Wales formed their own vocabulary in

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[217] Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), 92.

recounting the condition of their souls. In categorizing their spiritual states, leaders and laity alike used biblical phrases which were also commonly used in sermons and in categorizing hymns: "under the Law, "searching for the pearl," etc. Interestingly enough, this rise in self-reflective and self-evaluative activity coincided with the appearance of many new Welsh words containing the prefix *hunan*- (self-). As these words made their print debut in religious works, particularly in translations of English Puritan writers, it seems clear that a renewed interest in introspective analysis contributed to the development of the Welsh language itself.[218]

Many facets of eighteenth-century intellectual and religious thought simultaneously fostered a strong negativity surrounding the idea of the self. From a religious perspective, the human self was often subject to unfavorable comparisons with the divine other. In focusing on the imperfections of the self, the flawless Christ was simultaneously lifted up as the ultimate exemplar and source of inspiration. In a polemic against "self-preaching" delivered in 1776, David Sommervail exhorted that "self is neither the source from which our sermons proceed, nor the end to which they are directed; self is… intirely compatible with the great end and design of our sacred office."[219] For Sommervail, the self represented something utterly distinct from Christ. To emphasize the self in religious discourse was to detract from the proper recipient of devotion.

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[218] Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 76.
[219] David Sommervail, *The Preaching of Self Exploded, and the Preaching of Christ Explained and Enforced* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1776).

Literary scholar Scott Paul Gordon considers eighteenth-century subjectivity in relation to the concern for disinterestedness, for "behavior done for others, rather than for self." Within this scheme, argues Gordon, individual agents are not "self-determining," but instead agents of another authority. As individuals act on behalf of and in response to another force, their own subjectivity is defined by the degree to which they subject themselves to that force. Consequently, self-hood is passive and *re*active.

Focusing more specifically upon Methodism, literary scholar Misty Anderson observes that the self, "which does not satisfy the demand for autonomy and agency that liberalism articulates as a requirement of modern consciousness, is part of the eighteenth-century landscape… in which the [subject] seems glad to purchase ecstatic, divine presence at the price of an autonomous 'I.'"[220] And indeed, Methodist conversion moved the individual away from the illusion of the autonomous and self-sufficient subject to the new reality of being subject to Christ. Time and time again, Methodists lamented their past pride and confess their newfound reliance on Christ and Christ alone.

A number of scholars, particularly those who concern themselves with women's religious experience, have seized on the passivity trope as a means by which women were empowered to speak and write. Political philosopher Sonia Kruks argues that women could claim leadership by pointing to the divine origins of their experiences.[221] Similarly, Phyllis Mack writes of women's "strategies of self-assertion in a patriarchal,

[220] Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 199.
[221] See Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

class-based culture."[222] In these early Methodist narratives, however, women were not scheming to assume authority or to assert their God-given right to speak. Instead, both women and men were confronted with the task of committing their spiritual experiences to the page: ordinary living lay people found themselves freely given that liberty of liberties, and not knowing exactly what to do with it. It is clear that women were particularly attracted to Methodism, and certainly many found support, nourishment and opportunities that they had not found elsewhere. These narratives suggest that the particular task of writing was for many a challenge before it became a welcomed outlet of religious expression. Women carried the extra burden of transgressing the limits of what was considered "socially and theologically acceptable behaviour" for their sex.[223] Early writers, both women and men, needed to find a way to reconcile themselves to the task. It was only by pointing beyond themselves, by subjecting themselves to other authorities, that they were able to justify their audacity in writing. Necessity rendered the exceptional expedient.

How, then, did one write as a passive agent? One of the first steps was to identify an external authority that legitimated the activity of writing. In claiming an external authority, the individual was enabled to act in way she or he might not have otherwise acted. Literary scholar Vicki Tolar Burton observes that early Methodists often "perceived an inner sense that God wanted them to speak and had promised to lead them into public speech, to guide their ideas and words, and to unlock their silenced tongue,

[222] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 10.
[223] Aalders, *To Express the Ineffable*, 76.

giving them the liberty to speak from the heart."[224] For this reason, one might expect that the first Methodists also claimed a calling from God as their authority and motivation for writing. In fact, they almost never did so—at least, not explicitly on paper. While early Methodists testified to God's hand guiding almost every situation of their lives, writing proved a notable exception. Whatever they may have felt personally remains unknown, and the fact that a number of Methodists laity *did* write their conversion accounts must evince some conviction that it was a good and important exercise. Even so, the majority of early Methodists lodged their authority to write not in God alone, but in Charles Wesley.

Most early Methodists stated plainly that they wrote because Charles asked them to. One must not underestimate the significance of this demand, for at least some Methodists wrote *only* because Charles asked them to. While it may be more compelling to imagine that they found themselves irresistibly called by God to share their experiences, hardly any early Methodists designated a divine call as their motivation for writing. For oral testimonies yes, but not for written accounts. Whatever fears, uncertainties and objections they had were overshadowed by their loyalty and devotion to Charles. It seems that early Methodists of both sexes found it difficult to resist Charles's persistent charm. Even as late as 1778, John Haime wrote to John Wesley:

> A bout two years sinc youer brother desiered me to right sum thing of my expearens and of the worck it broad but I told him I coueld not doo it. I had no talent for it, nor mimerey. He seem to insist upon it, but I declined it. But his wordes have folowed me betimes ever sinc a bout a quarter of a yeare sinc I was much prest in spirit to right sum litel thieng so that I coueld not reast tell I gave up

[224] Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 300.

> my will. I have began. I have rote 10 sheets of paper all readey. I beleve I shall right 10 more.[225]

What we do not know is how many individuals were asked who flatly refused or were unable to complete their narratives. For these, their stories remain (as they may well have preferred) hidden from the eyes and ears of posterity.

The theology of early Methodism promoted a passive sense of self, which was then manifested in the discourse of conversion narratives. Methodists did not write of transformations that came about through their own efforts. Rather, they found themselves subjected to supernatural forces of good and evil, subjected to voices and phenomena beyond their control. They wrote of experiences that happened to them, describing their feelings in response to those experiences. They claimed "a subjectivity that figures them as responsive rather than responsible."[226] While early writers did take responsibility for their youthful sins and misdeeds, the perils of individual agency provided an excellent foil for the subjectivity of living in Christ. In accordance with English Protestantism of the time, early Methodists valued "the loss rather than the assertion of agency, subordination rather than self-sufficiency." According to Scott Paul Gordon, such individuals search for the presence of another (God/Christ), becoming anxious if they are unable to find the other inhabiting within them.[227] This partially accounts for the intense anxiety Methodists encountered during their periods of "convictions," the confusing stage prior to justification and receiving assurance of

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[225] John Haime to John Wesley, 1 June 1778, Letters to John Wesley box 1, MARC.
[226] Scott Paul Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.
[227] Ibid., 17.

Christ's presence. Within this period, one was aware of his or her need for Christ but had not yet felt Christ's presence within their hearts. This unfulfilled subjectivity caused great distress, which was later resolved by a powerful emotional and/or physical experience.

While early Methodists used passive language to underline a passive subjectivity, they also took pains to communicate simply and clearly. This concern stemmed from both practical and theological motivations. A number of scholars have addressed John Wesley's insistence upon plain speech.[228] Concerned with the instruction of "people of the lowest understanding," John encouraged his preachers to "use the most common, little, easy words… which our language affords," and to avoid "stiffness, apparent exactness," and "artificialness of style."[229]

It is clear that Methodist leaders carefully considered the language with which they addressed their hearers and readers. In the Conference Minutes of 1744, Methodist preachers determined to guard against formality in prayer and conversation in part by "watching always, that we may speak only what we feel."[230] The following year, they expressed concern about excessive intricacy and obscurity of the Methodist doctrine of justification, eventually surmising that the fault lay in both the devil and the "extreme warmth of most writers who have treated it."[231] In 1747, the preachers lamented not

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[228] See, for example, Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660-1780*, vol. I: *Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 216.

[229] John Wesley to Samuel Furly, 6 March 1764 and 15 July 1764 in Telford, *The Letters of John Wesley*, vol. 4, 232, 256-8. See also Isabel Rivers, "John Wesley and the Language of Scripture, Reason and Experience," *Prose Studies* 4, no. 3 (December 1981), 259.

[230] CM 1744, 26 June 1744, 17.

[231] CM 1745, 1 August 1745, 19.

having spoken "plain and home" enough to the poor.[232] They then advised one another to "Choose the plainest text you can" when preaching, to avoid "allegorizing or spiritualizing too much, and to be wary of "awkward or affected… gesture or pronunciation."[233] In 1748, they determined that their prayers tended to be too long and resolved to limit them to eight to ten minutes without interruption.[234]

Despite these resolutions, Methodists were still subject to critiques concerning their manner of speech. In a letter to William Seward, Charles Graves noted his friends' complaint that he "affect[ed] to talk in a mystical way." They harbored the same complaint against the Wesley brothers. Graves supposed the reason to be that Methodists spoke much of "experimental" Christianity—that is, the life of faith that cannot be observed with the "bodily eye." As a result, the "natural, carnal man" could not comprehend experiences that transcend his physical faculties.[235] While Graves's response clearly reflected early Methodist theology of faith and sensory perception (to be discussed further in the following chapter), it likely also served to legitimate his friends' complaints.

Methodists aspired to plain speech for the practical reasons of communicating clearly with one another and mitigating critiques from the public. They also held up plain speech as a means of communicating authentically. Simple, honest declarations of faith were valued for their authenticity and their efficacy. Joseph Humphreys ended his conversion narrative with an exhortation to speak simply and thoughtfully:

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[232] CM 1747, 18 June 1747, 48-49.
[233] Ibid., 50.
[234] CM 1748, 3 June 3 1748, 53.
[235] Charles Graves to William Seward, undated, DDSe 8, MARC.

> At present let us go on, simply declaring to others what the Lord hath done for our souls. Let us not stretch ourselves beyond our line. Let us long for a union in the Lord. Let every one that is without be astonished at our patience with and mildness towards one another. Above all, let us take heed of rash expressions. Let all our words flow out of that fulness of love which dwells in our hearts.[236]

Other early writers stated at the outset their desire to relate their stories as plainly as they could. William Barber hoped to give "as plain & as simple an account" as possible.[237] Ann Martin prayed that Charles Wesley will accept her narrative "from the Simplicity of [her] heart as a little child beging to speak plain."[238]

Early Methodists not only hoped that they themselves would speak plainly: they also expected to be spoken to in a frank but loving manner. As a result, many Methodists opened themselves to correction and instruction. William Barber, for instance, solicited the parental advice of Charles Wesley: "I hope you love me so well that what ever you think amiss in my writting that you wile correct me. Indeed I have need of help, I mean humane as well as devine."[239] Similarly, M. Grinfield wrote to Charles Wesley,

> I pray from the ground of my heart that [God] will also give you freedom and power to use great <u>plainness of speech</u> towards me, and that my spirit may be so subjected to his spirit within you as to receive all his teachings in meekness and true poverty, that I may profit from every dispensation of his love, however sharp.

She then prayed she might be made "obedient, simple, humble and teachable."[240] This openness to personal growth was also reflected in the Conference Minutes of 1745, in which Methodist preachers determined that they should "still consider [them]selves as

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[236] Joseph Humphreys to Charles Wesley, 3 December 1741, EMV 89.
[237] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 20.
[238] Ann Martin to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 4.
[239] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 27 December 1762, EMV 23.
[240] M. Grinfield to Charles Wesley, 30 April 1758, EMV 67.

little children, who have everything to learn," and keep their minds "always open to any farther light which God may give."[241]

Early Methodists relied on passivity and exterior agency in order to legitimate (for themselves as much as for others) the act of writing their own spiritual accounts. But there was another means by which they distanced themselves from the dangers of self-fashioning. In addition to highlighting the limitations of their own abilities, they also pointed to the limitations of language itself. As human beings were corrupt, so, too, was their language.[242] "Ineffability," writes Cynthia Aalders, "refers to the failure of language to be able to put something into words; it signifies that which is too great for words, transcending expression."[243]

Language necessarily failed to express spiritual experiences that test the limits of one's senses, of one's capacity for feeling and understanding. Mrs. Plat exclaimed, "O, what tongue can express what my soul do feel now. I am in Christ."[244] Eliza Mann prayed that God would let her mouth speak, as she herself was incapable of expressing Christ's love.[245] Martha Jones mused that as no one is capable of expressing God's love, "We can only wonder and silently adore."[246] John Walsh expressed his ineffable experience through poetry:

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[241] *Conference Minutes* 1745, 1 August 1745, 19.
[242] Aalders, *To Express the Ineffable*, 83.
[243] Ibid., 78.
[244] Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10.
[245] "Who is so great a god as our God? Oh praise ye the Lord, for he is good and his mercy endureth for ever. Who can uter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can sho forth all his praise? Oh Lord, do thou give me a heart to praise thy name, and to tel of all thy wonderous works. Fill me with thy love and out of the abundance of my heart, let my mouth speak. I cannot express the love of Christ to my soul." Eliza Mann to Charles Wesley, January 1742, EMV 107.
[246] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.

> O that I now could shew thy peaceful ways
> And speak the wonders of redeeming grace!
> But language fails and utterance melts away,
> Before the blaze of this my gospel day.[247]

Brett McInelly observes that early Methodists used the concept of the "unspeakable" to "validate what the believer felt but could not always explain."[248] In this way, the transcendent nature of the experiences and the corresponding failure of language constituted an exceptional circumstance that legitimated the writing of the narratives. Margarit Austin wrote of her experience kneeling down at the communion table, "I thought heaven was within me. Realy, I cannot express the joy for it is inexpressible."[249] Likewise, Sister Ibison remarked that during Friday prayers, "I was in such joy that I can not exprise it."[250] Early Methodist Hannah Hancock took this one step further, offering an alternative language—the language of her soul—for witnessing her encounters with Christ.[251]

For these writers, the inability to articulate one's experience was not distressing. On the contrary, it testified to the depth and authenticity of the experience. Charles Wesley recalled a profound moment of silence which accompanied an emotional reunion with fellow Methodists. In St. Ives, opponents of Methodism had destroyed all the preaching houses and had broken the windows of those thought to be Christians:

> We entered John Nance's house without molestation. Four of our sisters there, on sight of me, sunk down, unable to utter a word through joy and love. But they

[247] John Walsh to Charles Wesley, 11 August 1762, EMV 134
[248] McInelly, *Textual Warfare*, 133.
[249] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[250] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[251] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86.

> welcomed me with their tears. It was a solemn, silent meeting. In some time we recovered our speech for prayer and thanksgiving.[252]

The failure to speak reiterates the individual's subjectivity to divine actions which overwhelm human capacity. This lack of control over one's speech affirms God's authority and agency in the narrative and in one's life.

One of the default characteristics of spiritual accounts written by still-living persons is that the narratives are necessarily unfinished. Unlike deathbed accounts written by someone else, or Moravian autobiographies which were then completed by a second party, early Methodist narratives ended with a life still in progress. This represented a significant departure from the heroic lives Methodists might have been familiar with reading: here, there was no exemplary ending. At the end of the narrative, many writers paused to reflect on their present state and to beg prayers for what work was left to be done in their souls. At this point, many referenced Hebrews 12:2, looking to Jesus as the author and finisher of their faith. Sarah Barber, for instance, confessed: "there is great Corruptions Still in me : and I Doubt not but he that is the author will be the finisher of my faith."[253] Ann Martin took the opportunity to end her narrative with an exhortation for the reader to "look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of your faith."[254]

This concept seems to have been a favorite of Charles Wesley. Early Methodists would have absorbed it through his sermons, hymns and other Methodist media.[255] In

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[252] CWJ, vol. 2, 19 July 1744, 409.
[253] Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 7.
[254] Ann Martin to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 4.
[255] See, for examples, Charles's sermons in CWS: sermon 4, p. 147; sermon 9, p. 237; sermon 7, p. 202. See also Charles's hymns in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740): "The Life of Faith, Exemplified in the Eleventh Chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews," "Looking unto Jesus," "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth,"and "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

Charles's hymn "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith," for example, the singer professes: "I wait the word that speaks me whole."[256] Kathleen Lynch reflects that "the autobiographical narrative… seeks to assert identity by articulating coherence within the boundaries of an individual existence, and yet reaches for a beginning before individual consciousness and an end beyond narratibility."[257] If God is not credited with the impulse for writing, God is at least given authorial recognition at the end. He who brings the life to fulfillment also completes the narrative.

Closing reflections

As stated before, I have purposely confined myself to the first three decades of Methodism. As the majority of scholarship on Methodist autobiographical material has focused on printed narratives, and thus on the latter third of the eighteenth century, I wanted to shift the spotlight to highlight the distinctive challenges of Methodism's first generation. It seems to me that some of the assumptions and conclusions drawn about later narratives simply do not hold for the earlier ones—at least not all of them.

Scholars of religious autobiography and of Methodist autobiography in particular often describe the act of writing as a liberating technology of self-fashioning. The subject, or the human independent agent discovers, creates and asserts itself through the bold act of putting pen to paper. In her work on autobiography in eighteenth-century England, Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests that "autobiographies affirm identity… putting

[256] John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), 91.
[257] Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

a life into words rescues it from confusion."[258] Historian Tom Webster, in an article on the role of spiritual journaling in early Methodism, also points to the power of writing as a way of validating experience, and Phyllis Mack claims that "the injunction to report experience… was a radical democratization of traditional religious practice."[259] Similarly, Andrew Winckles uses *Arminian Mazagine* accounts as the basis for his claim that "for early Methodist women, the impetus to act, speak and write within a public space was… a natural extension of their internal spiritual experience."

While I would agree that autobiographies eventually came to serve as a clarifying exercise and a positive declaration of individual identity and agency, these liberating effects of writing the self were not initially celebrated in the same way by early Methodists. In fact, they ran counter to eighteenth-century and early Methodist conceptions of the self. As I have tried to demonstrate, for many of the earliest Methodists, the act of writing about the self was not natural at all. Indeed it was for some quite unnatural and problematic, demanding the requisite apologies, deferential gestures, external authorities and evidence of compelling circumstances.

The Methodists of the 1770s and 1780s, however, had had some time to grow accustomed to the concept of reading and writing spiritual narratives of ordinary living persons. Phyllis Mack writes of this evolution: "As accounts of conversion expanded into full-fledged autobiographies and regular correspondence, the continued habit of writing gave Methodists not only an authorial voice but also a different perception of the

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[258] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1, 21.
[259] Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy," 47.

nature of their own emotions. Rather than depict their feelings as energy forces that invaded their bodies or erupted out of them against their will, Methodists began to write of feelings as both susceptible of analysis and subject to deliberate, self-conscious control." As the conception of the self continued to shift, so then did the manner of expressing that self on paper.

I close with two particular writing experiences that illustrate this shift in self-conception. In 1683, a young apprentice named Elias Pledger took his pen to write an account of his life. After an introductory statement in the third person announcing his name, and date and place of birth, he began the narrative proper. He wrote: "He was born of godly parents." Pledger then went back, crossed out the third-person "he" and replaced it with a first-person "I," continuing the rest of the account in the first person. This small mistake reveals a big question: am I a subject or an object, or both?[260]

In 1781, at the age of 88, priest and Methodist advocate Vincent Perronet took his pen to write an account of his life. Though he wrote his introduction in the third person, he automatically shifted to the first person in the narrative proper. After the first two pages, he seemed to have decided to exercise more deliberate authorial control over the narrative, as he crossed out all the "I"s and "me"s and replaced them with "him"s and "he"s.[261] I interpret this move not as a reversion to a seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century notion of selfhood, but as a conscious decision to assume author-ity over the publication of his life.

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[260] Mascuch, *The Origins of the Individualist Self*, 99.
[261] Vincent Perronet, "Some Remarkable Events in the Life of a Certain Person Who is Now, 1781 in the 88th Year of His Age, to which is Added an Appendix," Vincent Perronet Papers, MARC.

In summary and in closing, the trajectory of Methodist spiritual narratives manifests on a large scale the movement that Andrew Winckles observes within individual conversion narratives: that is, that narrative community emerges from the destabilization of the self. In breaking down the "vile self" and moving away from the worldly notion of individual agency, laity of varying social status and literate abilities struggled to claim their authorial voice. Only by employing passive strategies that allowed them to displace agency and authority were early Methodists enabled to reveal their spiritual challenges and triumphs through both oral testimony and written narrative.

CHAPTER THREE

SIGHT AND THE SELF

"Seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer.
Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism … Seeing is being seen."[262]

Figure 3. Devils rejoicing in having turned Israelites away from God

[262] James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 11-12.

Introduction

The writings of early Methodists are full of metaphorical language related to visual perception: contrasts between darkness and light, blindness and sight, and the phenomena of seeing and being seen. Methodists wrote vividly of their experiences visualizing both the sorrowful sufferings and the luminous glory of Christ, as well as ominous depictions of hell and damnation. While hearing sermons, they often had the impression that God and the preacher could see through to the true state of their souls, exposing all secret sins. Methodists were also frequently confronted with the startling sight of their wicked, vile, deceitful selves. This chapter examines the function of sight and seeing in the early British Methodist process of conversion. Other instances of visual experiences will be addressed in the following chapters, but the present chapter is concerned with visual experience as it relates to initial encounters with evangelical Christianity in general and Methodism in particular.[263] How did the experience of seeing and being seen function within the early stages of Methodist spirituality? How did the language of sight perception reflect, inform and challenge a sense of the self?

Throughout history, the eye has been the privileged organ for apprehending truth. We trust the eyes to convey an accurate representation of our surroundings. An eyewitness account, for instance, is always more reliable than indirect evidence. [264] The culture and vocabulary of the Enlightenment only served to strengthen this bond between

[263] Likewise, visual experiences which fall outside my specified timeline will not be treated, such as the "visions of perfection," as identified by Henry Rack, which occurred in the late eighteenth century. See further Henry D. Rack, "Early Methodist Visions of the Trinity," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 46, 2 parts (May and October 1987).

[264] Marita Amm, "Might and Magic, Lust and Language—The Eye as a Metaphor in Literature: Notes on the Hierarchy of the Senses," *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 101 (2000), 227-28.

reality and the eye. During the eighteenth century, scholars of the eye and its perception began to expand their investigation beyond "purely medical" concerns into the field of epistemology. "In their discourses on light, enlightenment and elucidation the eye took on a metaphysical status; seeing was a holistic process."[265] A similar process occurred within Methodism. Here, sight also functioned as a primary means of discerning veracity, but with a twist. Methodists, like many other Christians, maintained a belief in the invisible realms of heaven and hell. On occasion, however, one could catch glimpses of these eternal spaces through visions, dreams and other ecstatic experiences. According to Methodist leaders Charles and John Wesley, one not only possessed five physical senses for apprehending the physical realm, but also a spiritual sense for apprehending the spiritual realm.[266] The hymns of Charles Wesley are indeed filled with language of sight and seeing, constantly espousing the "relationship between sight, feeling and spiritual change."[267] Following the vocabulary utilized in Methodist circles, early Methodists thus employed the "eye of faith" to perceive spiritual truths that eluded the weaker physical eye.

The problem with the eye, however, is that it both "perceives *and produces* images."[268] As ophthalmologist Marita Amm observes,

> In literature the eye has a *passive* and an *active* role; it has an influence and is influenced… The morphological peculiarities of the optical system of the eye can

[265] Amm, "Might and Magic, Lust and Language," 225.
[266] See John Wesley's sermons 10 and 11, "The Witness of the Spirit, Discourses I & II" in ed. Albert C. Outler, JWW, 1:267.
[267] Joanna Cruickshank, "Appear as Crucified: Sight, Suffering, and Spiritual Transformation in the Hymns of Charles Wesley," *Journal of Religious History* 30, no. 3 (October 2006), 320.
[268] Amm, "Might and Magic, Lust and Language," 224 (emphasis mine).

> cause ambivalent, deceptive feelings. It is attractive and alarming. It induces a permanent oscillation between veracity and virtual reality, fact and fiction. [269]

How to verify spiritual sights which necessarily cannot be seen by anyone else? A significant number of Methodists did write of the spiritual sights they witnessed as part of their conversion experiences. For the most part, they seemed quite confident that they saw what they saw, and that they felt what they felt. For them, the difficulty lay rather in the interpretation of those sights and the implications for one's own spiritual state. Am I resting in a state of damnation? Have I been justified? Or somewhat ironically, have I received assurance of faith? Nevertheless, Methodists were quite conscious of the extraordinary nature of their experiences. Sensitive to criticism and opposition, they used metaphorical qualifiers ("I saw *as if* in a vision…") in an attempt to sidestep accusations of irrational, enthusiastic behavior. At the same time, they remained firm in their insistence that their experiences were authentic, and that the realm perceived through the spiritual sense was even more real than the tangible, visible world they presently inhabited.

There appears in the conversion narratives a broad movement from the passive experience of being seen to the active experience of seeing spiritual sights. What is striking is that (for those who experienced it) the sight of the self appears to have functioned as a turning point at which Methodists were enabled to begin consciously apprehending and participating in the spiritual visual spectrum. The unsightly vision of the "vile self" helped to construct a counterfeit, worldly identity against which the spiritual self could be discovered. The progression of visual language and visual

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[269] Ibid., 226.

experiences led the individual through a death to the worldly self into rebirth as a "new creature." While Marita Amm poses the question, "Is seeing a requirement for thinking?" others link seeing with knowing and feeling.[270] I will suggest that, for the early Methodists, true seeing was a correlate of true being.

This study is divided into sections according to the progression of the narratives themselves. Accordingly, the following categories designate the different stages as presented by the early Methodist writers: pre-conversion, awakening, convictions, conversion and post-conversion. While these categories and their appellations may be debatable, they serve both to highlight the overarching pattern of spiritual progression as well as to corral the specificities of individual experience. Whether this movement reflected the actual progression of Methodists' experiences as they unfolded in "real time" cannot be known. It does, however, offer insight into the early Methodist *narrative* of spiritual progression as individuals attempted to recognize and place themselves within that narrative. The chapter is thus structured to follow the narrative pattern in the hope of enabling the reader to enter more fully into the life and rhythm of early Methodist spiritual concerns.

Pre-conversion concerns

Most spiritual accounts began by recounting one's life prior to encountering evangelical preaching and doctrine. Within this section, the writers interpreted their childhood and early life, often in terms of darkness and blindness. This section gives attention to both the visual language employed by early Methodist writers, the sources

[270] Ibid., 223.

from which it sprang, and the ways it reflected and contributed to an understanding of non-evangelical Christianity. It also examines visualizations experienced prior to conversion and how early Methodists situated them within the grand narrative of Methodist spirituality.

Following chronological order, the narrative proper typically began by recounting one's pre-conversion life. For many writers, this began with childhood. Historian Bruce Hindmarsh observes that writers often describe childhood as "a state of relative innocence and spiritual promise."[271] Indeed, many of these Methodists spoke of an unconscious attraction to God, often described as "drawings." This attraction preceded both conscious theological reflection and fluency in the vocabulary of faith. Sarah Colston, for example, "often felt the sweet heavenly drawing of the spirit of God."[272] Similarly, Mary Maddern's account began: "Allmost from my earliest infancy he seemd to dray me to him self, and I had strong desires at times. And when about eight years ould, I shurely had a tast of the love of God, tho I knew not what it was, but felt such love to Jesus Christ that I longed to die to be with him."[273]

Despite these fleeting moments of bliss, these positive impressions did not typically generate visualizations. In one of the rare instances of an encouraging childhood vision, Richard Rodda recalled: "When I was about four years old, as I was lying on the ground, and looking up to heaven, I thought I saw the form of a large tree.

[271] Hindmarsh, "'My Chains Fell Off,'" 922.
[272] Paul Chilcote, ed., *In Her Own Story*, 44.
[273] Mary Maddern to Charles Wesley, 29 June, 1762, EMV 105.

While I gazed on it, something inwardly said 'That is the tree of life.' This was before I could read, or even know a letter."[274]

Most early visual experiences, however, were intensely frightening and strongly related to fears of death and judgment. Mary Jane Ramsay recalled one instance in which "I thought I saw the devil standing upon the bed with great claws over me, ready to take me, and with the fright I skriekt… these things left a great terrour upon me for some time."[275] Similarly, Robert Wilkinson was also "often terrified in dreams and visions of the night. Sometimes I thought I was falling down steep precipices; at others, that the devil was standing over me to take me away immediately. As such times I have often waked, shrieking in such a manner as terrified all who heard me."[276]

Many writers had strict religious upbringings and grew up within a moral framework which they did not initially question or challenge. The image of God as judge combined with an intense fear of death (fruits of the aforesaid religious upbringing) produced "prime candidates for evangelical conversion."[277] Indeed, fear played a significant role in stimulating spiritual reflection and motivating religious behaviors, and was certainly utilized with great effect in early evangelical preaching. Even prior to their initial encounters with Methodism, though, many young would-be Methodists were already impressed by the seriousness of living and dying.

Nicholas Gilbert affirmed, "I had a real reverance for the name of God ever since I have any rememberance of any thing… Religious lessons and religion itself wer [?]

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[274] John Telford, *Wesley's Veterans: Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told by Themselves*, vol. 4 (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1912), 194.
[275] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[276] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans,* vol. 5, 229.
[277] Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 137-38.

amiable in my sight." At the same time, "Death was dreadful to me alwais, and my meditations on it have been very deep and frequently distressing."[278] Despite a longing to die in order to live with Christ, eight-year-old Mary Maddern also experienced an uneasiness concerning her state after death. She wrote that at age twelve, "that uneasyness gratly incresd through avery auefull dreme that I had. I atended upon the means of grace, but cold find no comfort."[279] Though Mary Holder's conscience was not troubled during the daytime, at night her "painful reflections increased, with the fear of dying in my present state," so that she dared not sleep without first saying her prayers. "I often asked the Almighty, with great sincerity and importunity, to spare me, thinking I would strive to be better; but when morning returned my best thoughts passed away like the early dew."[280]

With high child mortality rates, death was a prominent feature of eighteenth-century life. It is possible that some were more or less accustomed to the situation and had learned to exercise some form of emotional detachment. It is clear, however, that exposure to death and its accompanying discourse left its mark on many young religious consciences. For instance, Sarah Crosby worried about the state of her soul after death each time she attended a funeral. Eventually, these fears led to a type of near-death experience. At the age of seventeen, while sitting alone,

> I was struck, as I thought, with *death*; being seized with a cold trembling from head to foot, which, increasing, I directly fell on my knees, and prayed the Lord to forgive my sins, and save my soul. All that I knew to be sin was then placed before me; so that I had but little hope of mercy. But while I laid myself down to

[278] Nicholas Gilbert to Charles Wesley, August 1760, EMV 63.
[279] Mary Maddern to Charles Wesley, 29 June, 1762, EMV 105.
[280] Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, vol. 1, 101.

> die, my strength came to me again, for which I was very thankful, and made great promises to live to God; but did not begin to put them in practice till some months after…[281]

While some Methodists considered fear a natural characteristic of the pre-converted state, others interpreted devilish visions in retrospect as a manifestation of divine mercy. In recalling her terrifying dreams, Mary Jane Ramsay praised God for "his great mercy towards such a young devil as I."[282] William Hunter also experienced a dream of Satan coming for him, upon which he woke full of fear, praying for deliverance. In his life account, he lamented that these "good impressions gradually wore off," due to lack of spiritual instruction.[283] In this sense, fear could be useful if it motivated the individual to turn toward God. As a young man, John Wesley wrote of the necessity of fear of death as "a remarkable and useful 'intuition' to sustain and preserve life."[284] "But if pain and the fear of death were extinguished, no animal could long subsist."[285]

At the same time, the fear of death and judgment had to be overcome in order to live fully. Methodists were taught that they could expect to receive full assurance of forgiveness of sins, and that as converted people, there was no need to fear the punishments of hell. Indeed, fear of death was evidence that one had not yet received assurance of forgiveness, and the question, "Are you afraid to die?" soon became a litmus test of Methodist conversion. Charles Wesley first recorded asking the question of an

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[281] Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, vol. 2, 26.
[282] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[283] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 4, 170.
[284] Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley and the Fear of Death as a Standard of Conversion," in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, eds. Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 57.
[285] John Wesley to Samuel Wesley senior, 15 January 1731 in ed. Frank Baker, JWW, 25:265.

acquaintance just days after his own conversion, which followed on the heels of an apparent brush with death. He wrote of her response:

> Her answers were so full to these and the most searching questions I could ask, that I had no doubt of her having received the atonement, and waited for it myself with a more assured hope. Feeling an anticipation of joy upon her account, and thanking Christ as I could, I looked for him all night with prayers and sighs and unceasing desires.[286]

In the conversion narratives, the early writers often referred to the period prior to conversion in terms of darkness and blindness. Like sight, blindness is "a cultural category constituted by those who write and speak of it. It means very different things, and moreover it *is* very different things, at different times, different places, and in different kinds of writing."[287] Following biblical and enlightenment tropes contrasting the light of truth with the darkness of ignorance, Methodists used darkness and blindness to describe their lack of understanding before encountering evangelical doctrine. Despite her efforts at outward holiness and her belief that she was a sincere Christian, Sarah Middleton claimed she was still in darkness.[288] Elizabeth Halfpenny recalled that she had not yet seen a "glympse of the light of God's countenance, and went on all in darkness and had no thoughts of a saviour."[289] Katharine Gilbert explained that before the arrival of the Wesleys, she knew nothing of "faith alone in Christ, the operations of the Holy Ghost, what it was to be born of God, or how to become as a little child a new creature in Christ," as she had been "Ignorantly led and taught."[290]

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[286] CWJ, vol. 1, 17 May 1738, 104-5.
[287] William R. Paulson, *Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4.
[288] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5.
[289] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.
[290] Katharine Gilbert to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 6.

At other times, darkness referred to particular errors and misconceptions adhered to prior to conversion. When describing their early attempts to follow a religious lifestyle, many writers lamented that they relied on outward, formal observances to secure their salvation. In Methodist terminology, this was termed "formality." Prior to accepting all-sufficient divine grace, many early writers trusted in their own agency, often feeling secure in their own efforts. Before encountering evangelical doctrine, many writers were comfortable enough, assured that their good works (and similarly their lack of malevolent acts) would earn them good standing in heaven and on earth. This "error" resulted in the illusion of self-sufficiency, and therefore a distorted view of both the salvific process and the nature of the self. Sister Ibison related succinctly, "For befor this day I was well. I though I was very good becose the world coled me so."[291] Sarah Barber also "thought [her] Self a very good person," as she "was not a notorious open offender." For this reason, she was unable to see that she was "a Publican Living in the world as if there was no god."[292] Likewise, Katharine Gilbert confessed that, "I thought my Self Something."[293]

Early writers also employed the concepts of darkness and blindness to capture the experience of living life according to an illusion. In this way, darkness served as a metaphor for a troubled soul wandering aimlessly. John Edmonds described his soul as walking in "thick clouds and darkness," while Elizabeth Halfpenny wrote that she "shed

[291] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[292] Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 7.
[293] Katharine Gilbert to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 6.

tears very often," was "groveling in the dark, and knew not whither I went."[294] In contrast to the converted state, which implies enlightenment, clarity, warmth and life, the pre-converted state was characterized by non- or malfunctioning senses, a corruption of both body and soul. Writers spoke of cold hearts, dead spirits, resulting from a disconnect between the superficial actions of the body and the genuine life of the soul. The cumulative effect was of a potentially able-bodied person who groped through life wearing a blindfold, unaware of the possibility of removing the blindfold. Elizabeth Bristow described her pre-converted state with an abundance of bodily metaphors, seeing herself as lame, blind, in bondage, a firebrand in hell, dead and in darkness.[295] With even heightened pathos, Mariah Price expressed her amazement that "such a dark, dead, stony-hearted, damned unbeleveing Pharisee as I" could be saved. She elaborated on her lack of vision, confessing that she was "as dark as a blind man from his birth that never had no thought of sight. And if he heard that there was such a thing, he did not beleve it because he had it not himself."[296]

As most of the early writers were converted by Charles and had been solicited by Charles to write their spiritual experiences, it is no surprise that much of their language can be traced to Charles's preaching. In a sermon delivered at Oxford in 1742, Charles Wesley described the "sleeper" in Ephesians 5:14 who was exhorted to "awake… and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."[297] According to Charles, those who sleep are those who are spiritually unawakened. They rest in the "state of nature," "a

[294] John Edmonds to Charles Wesley, 4 September 1739, EMV 55; Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.
[295] Elizabeth Bristow to Charles Wesley, 12 April 1740, EMV 11.
[296] Mariah Price to Charles Wesley, 18 May 1740, EMV 12.
[297] CWS, 213.

state of utter darkness, a state wherein 'darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people.'" Such sleepers do not even know that they are fallen, that they stand in need of new birth, that they are "full of all diseases." In this state, they believe themselves to be "happy," "at liberty" and "satisfied," as they have not yet seen themselves surrounded by flames. Though they are in the midst of their natural life, they rest in a state of spiritual death; they are compared to a "'painted sepulchre,' which 'appears beautiful without,' but nevertheless is 'full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness'" (Matt. 23:27). They believe themselves secure because of their own works, though in fact they remain completely ignorant of their perilous state. Indeed, Sarah Middleton recalled that while she exercised outward holiness by attending church and sacrament and avoiding worldly people and activities, she was still a stranger to evangelical doctrines of salvation and justification by faith. "I had no oyl in my lamp, no inward principal [sic] of holiness in my Heart… What was I but a white sepulchre? The harlot and publicans would have entered into the kingdom of heaven before me."[298]

Charles affirmed that the pre-converted individual had not only faulty eyes, but that in fact all the senses were defective. Here, he distinguished between the physical senses and the spiritual senses, giving priority to the latter. As those who rested in a natural state had not yet cultivated spiritual senses, they were as yet unable to perceive spiritual things:

> one dead in sin has not "senses exercised to discern" spiritual "good and evil." "Having eyes, he sees not; he hath ears, and hears not." He doth not "taste and see that the Lord is gracious." He "hath not seen God at any time," nor "heard his voice," nor "handled the Word of life." In vain is the name of Jesus "like

[298] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5 and CWS, 218.

> ointment poured forth," and "all his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia." The soul that sleepeth in death hath no perception of any objects of this kind. His heart is "past feeling," and understandeth none of these things. And hence, having no spiritual senses, no inlets of spiritual knowledge, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; nay, he is so far from receiving them that whatsoever is spiritually discerned is mere foolishness unto him.[299]

This state of spiritual somnolence was only temporary, provided that the individual was able to be awakened. In this sense, the condition of spiritual blindness was something that could be cured. As William R. Paulson affirms, "rather than a malediction or chastisement, blindness becomes a negative moment (comparable to the lost sheep or the prodigal son), necessary as a contrast and precondition to display the power of redemption and grace."[300] For early Methodists and other evangelicals, blindness was a necessary precondition of sight.

Awakening

How, then, did writers transition from a state of darkness and pseudo-life into the light of a new spiritual reality? How did they break out of their worldly illusions and begin to perceive spiritual realities? Methodists commonly used the term "awakening" to designate the moment at which the conversion process began, the "initial pricking of conscience" that would eventually lead to "new birth." Indeed, as Hindmarsh notes, "So often the convert used the metaphor of being woken from a deep sleep to describe his or her experience, so much so that to be 'awakened' became a cliché."[301] The pervasiveness of the metaphor is clear in its attachment to major evangelical revivals on both sides of the Atlantic.

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[299] CWS, 215-16.
[300] Paulson, *Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France*, 8.
[301] Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 140.

While the metaphor of waking to morning light did figure into early Methodist spirituality (and indeed Christianity in general), this particular awakening was rather rude. In contrast to illuminating warmth and clarity that one might expect from an Enlightenment metaphor, this light was harsh, exposing ugliness, disease, secret sins and wicked desires. This light cut through the illusory fog of worldly promise to reveal the natural self, the evil that resides within. This light enabled converts to see themselves as dead before entering into new life.

The evangelical moment of awakening was a destabilizing experience in which one became aware that the state of one's soul was more precarious than previously thought; the possibility of damnation became startlingly real; one's previous system of works righteousness was destroyed; and one discovered one's inability to escape the predicament alone, hence the profound need of a savior. While one's previous life may have been confident and comfortable, it became clear that this was a false assurance, that one's ideas about how to be a good person were vastly inadequate, and that one was not, in fact, a true Christian. Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, the road to lasting spiritual confidence began with a deep sense of inadequacy and confusion, often leading one to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?"

Despite some degree of variety among the awakening experiences recorded, the evangelical preaching event remained the primary setting for attracting and creating new evangelical converts. Many Methodists attributed a particular preacher as their "instrument of awakening," often recalling with startling detail the texts expounded, the manner of preaching, and their initial impressions upon first hearing a strange, new

doctrine. Though some writers were awakened by other Methodist or non-Methodist preachers before encountering the more prominent leaders, the majority of writers had their initial evangelical encounter in the presence of George Whitefield, John Wesley or Charles Wesley. For those in the Bristol region writing narratives upon Charles's request, it was common to have first encountered George Whitefield before his departure to America, who was then followed by John, who then passed the torch to Charles. Despite some differences among the three preachers, they all drove home the same basic foundational ideas of evangelicalism.[302]

Audience members were struck with sorrow, agony and misery to learn that their souls were in peril. Elizabeth Hinsom found herself "sinking into hell" after a sermon of Mr. Pearkens convinced her that she was a damned sinner.[303] Elizabeth Halfpenny could not accept Charles Wesley's message that she ranked among "whores and drunkards and outward sinners… and staggered thereat very much."[304] Whitefield's egalitarian message that all deserved damnation did not lessen the sorrow that Sarah Middleton felt under his preaching: "Them words usd to sink deep into my Heart."[305] Hearers found themselves shocked and disillusioned to learn that their good works were not enough to assure their salvation, and that despite their apparent virtue when compared to others, they had in fact broken "all" of God's commandments. Though Sarah Colston thought she was good, she

[302] Though George Whitefield was an early leader and associate of Methodism, he soon split with Charles and John Wesley due to theological differences—namely his support of predestination in contrast with the Wesleys' Arminianism.
[303] Elizabeth Hinsom to Charles Wesley, 25 May 1740, EMV 2.
[304] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.
[305] Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 5.

learned that "all this wile I knew nothing yet, as I ought to know."[306] With an air of boastfulness, James Flewitt declared,

> I was disobedient to all the commands of God, & what commands I obey'd of men was moore in fear than duty. I have violated evry command of God in the gros sence, accepting murder & that in the spiritual sence, a thousand times. Sure I am that their's not a greater siner out of hell than I am, & if any one crys out distinguishing grace, I moore.[307]

Mary Thomas used to think herself "good" compared to her neighbors who drank and swore. Though she maintained a "good name amongst [her] aquaintance which was pleasing to flesh and blood," she learned that she was in fact a "divel" who had deceived both herself and everyone else.[308]

As if this were not enough to bear, audience members also received the doubly discouraging news that they were completely incapable of improving their state by their own efforts. While a few found relief in the knowledge that God alone could save them, most entered a period of restless bewilderment, struggling to discern between divine and human agency. Hannah Hancock attempted to make many "resolutions" and "promisis of ammendment," but decided after repeated failures that they had been motivated by her own strength and not that of God.[309] Feeling the "burden of sin indeed intolrable," Mary Maddern wandered several months "in deep distress of soul." Despite—or perhaps because of—regular attendance at sermons, she saw herself "wors and wors, and farder and farder… from God."[310]

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[306] Paul Chilcote, ed., *In Her Own Story*, 44.
[307] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.
[308] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128.
[309] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86.
[310] Mary Maddern to Charles Wesley, 29 June, 1762, EMV 105.

Within the preaching event, Methodists found themselves attracted by an intensely personal message they felt was spoken directly to them. After hearing Charles Wesley at Kennington Common, Sister Ibison felt like "he had spake it all to me, for I sow all that I had ever though & dun in my life, so that I was the greatest sinner that ever lived." She later heard John Wesley preach about the want of a new heart, and again she "though it was all spake to me."[311] Thomas Middleton felt himself similarly affected by a worship service at the Foundery, in which "the hymns and the preaching seemed to be directed immediately to me."[312] These personal experiences were not only encouraged, but in fact created by the intensely individual messages and delivery of Methodist preachers.

Not only were the preachers effective in *speaking* to individuals, they were also effective at *looking* at them. Many writers recounted the unsettling experience of being under the eye of the preacher. Some felt as if the preacher was looking straight at them, or rather through them, into the secret depths of their soul. Richard Rodda recalled hearing a "certain preacher in St. Just" in 1756: "I thought, as soon as he began, he could not have much to say; but before he had done, I thought he kept his eye continually on me, while everything he said seemed to point at me. I could hardly bear it and had some thoughts of moving to another part of the house, where he might not see me."[313]

John Nelson offered a secondhand testimony from a soldier whom he overheard speaking about the first time he heard John Wesley: "But when he began to speak, his

[311] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[312] Thomas Middleton to Charles Wesley, 8 October 1743, EMV 111.
[313] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 4, 195-96.

words made me tremble. I thought he spoke to no one but me, and I durst not look up; for I imagined all the people were looking at me. I was ashamed to show my face, expecting God would make me a public example, either by letting the earth open and swallow me up, or by striking me dead."[314] For these and others in the preaching audience, the message of the preacher struck them as intensely personal, evoking feelings of guilt and shame at having been "discovered."

The fact that so many people found the preacher to be looking singularly at them suggests not only a startling new message, but also a novel performance style. Of his first time hearing John Wesley in Moorfields, John Nelson wrote:

> Oh that was a blessed morning to my soul! As soon as he got upon the stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and, when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done, I said, "This man can tell the secrets of my heart: he hath not left me there; for he hath showed the remedy, even the blood of Jesus."[315]

George Whitefield took this one step further, voicing aloud his observations of the effects that his preaching had on the audience: "I see you concerned… I see you weeping… Thus, I trust, some of you begin to feel…"[316] When Samuel Webb heard Charles Wesley preach on the Samaritan woman at the well, he was not hearing an unfamiliar text for the first time. However, Charles's "zealous looks and forsable words" caused him to hear the text anew and to believe that Charles's "spake as never man spake." At the moment upon

[314] Ibid., vol. 3, 13-14.
[315] Ibid., 11.
[316] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 72.

which Jesus disclosed the woman's adultery, Webb felt that "he knows the secrets of all hearts, for I thought mine would aburst."[317]

The effect of the preacher's gaze only intensified the already piercing message of damnation. Audience members were simultaneously shocked at having learned of their perilous state, ashamed at being exposed by the preacher's X-ray vision, and frightened that others would similarly see through them. Naomi Thomas was so "ashamed of [her] own vileness" after hearing John Wesley that she was unable to speak to anyone about her "condition." She recalled being "afraid I should expose myself before all the people," "afraid men should see me," and "afraid to venter again" to hear preaching.[318]

Convictions

At this point, many were plunged into crisis, or convictions, as it was called. During this agonizing period, many wrote they saw nothing but hell and damnation, and cried out continually (at the prompting of Methodist preachers) "What must I do to be saved?" The newfound discovery of damnation coupled with the conundrum of not being able to do anything about it proved overwhelming for many early Methodists. Mary Thomas recalled, "I could find no comefort for me. I knew not where to go. I began to wish I never had heard [the Methodists]."[319] Some, as Martha Jones, began to wish they

[317] Samuel Webb to Charles Wesley, 20 November 1741, EMV 18.
[318] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.
[319] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128.

had never been born.[320] Others, more imaginatively, wished they had instead been born a sheep, cow or toad.[321]

Writers employed liberally the language of imprisonment, echoing plaintively the phrase "deep spirit of bondage" as foretold by Methodist preaching. For some, the weight of this unbearable burden took a physical toll. Sarah Middleton wrote, "my soul was like the troubled sea so that it weight my body down so that my mother and others thought I should hardly overcome it." Though offered "outward comfort," she declined, being certain "it was for sin," and instead trusted that "the Power of the lord was present to heal me."

Equally confounding as the reality of damnation was the proposed method of salvation, or at least of apprehending salvation. No longer was it enough to know that one was saved—one could and should expect to *feel* oneself saved. This movement beyond mere intellectual assent was problematic for many. How should one trust and evaluate *feelings*?[322] Many grew distressed if their emotional state did not correspond to that described by Methodist preaching. Ann Martin wrote to Charles Wesley, "I went away from you very heavy and soon began to grieve that I griev'd no more."[323] Elizabeth Sais spoke clearly to the effects of peer pressure and the cognitive dissonance that arises when one's experience falls short of expectations.

> When Mr. Wesley came, I went to hear him in Nicholas Street society, but at that time the word had little effect on me. But at his preaching at Clifton Church, the

[320] Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, June 1740, EMV 3.
[321] For example, John Furz exclaimed upon seeing a dead toad, "O that I had been a toad!" Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 5, 204; John Nelson, "Oh that I had been a cow, or a sheep!" and "Oh that I had never been born!" Ibid. vol. 3, 8.
[322] See Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 141-142, 159.
[323] Ann Martin to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 4.

> word came very sweet and with power, and I shed tears, but knew not well for what reason. I went constantly to the societies, and at one time when the people were taken with violent fits of conviction, some of whom being in a few minuits set at liberty and sang praise to the Lord, and I also sympathized with them, and thought that I also must have been partaker of their condition before I could be a Christian, and wished to undergo the same convictions.[324]

Despite Charles Wesley's detailed sermon on the "Three States," in which he describes the conditions prior to, during and after conversion, many early Methodists were left groping after something they did not understand. Mary Jane Ramsay recounted a time when she was "expecting something of the Lord, but I knew not what, nor what to ask for."[325] Added to this confusion was the specifically evangelical vocabulary of conversion (awakening, justification, full assurance of faith, remission of sins, etc.), the significance and evidence of which were debated even among evangelical leaders throughout the eighteenth century. What were the signs that one had arrived at a particular state? Could one pass through multiple stages simultaneously?[326] Early Methodists struggled to fit their experiences into this vocabulary, as they struggled even to identify what constituted an experience. Sometimes individuals decided for

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[324] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[325] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[326] Benjamin Ingham to Charles Wesley on the "of the newly-justified": "I know of no instance in these points of any one being awakened, receiving remission of sins, & the full assurance of faith all at once. Persons sometimes have great joy when they are 1st awakeen'd, but is neither forgiveness of sins nor the assurance of faith but it is given to draw them forward. Some souls are terrified greatly when they are first awakened, & may be within a few days or week receive great joy & are in a flaming zeal, but neither is that forgiveness of sin nor assurance of faith. Others are in a great earnestness & have great joy for half a year or a year but neither is that forgiveness of sins nor assurance of faith, but it is the good gift of God to help them forward in the way to heaven. Before any one can receive remission of sins he must 1st be convinced of sin, not only of his gross outward sins but of that whole body of sin that is in him, which the scripture call unbelief: that is a departing from God in every respect. This conviction of sin begets a godly sorrow or mourning which brings the soul very low, & makes it poor indeed. And when God sees the heart sufficiently broken & contrite then he pardons the person; the fruit of which pardon or justification is preace, sometimes usherd in with great joy, tho sometimes joy does not come till a good while after; however the heart of the person is easy & at rest, calmly & quietly trusting in the L'd Jesus." DDPr 1/50, MARC.

themselves according to what they had learned from Methodist practice, but at other times they needed a trusted leader to make the diagnosis for them. Margarit Austin, for instance, knew she had felt something, but she was unable to identify whether or not she had been justified and at what point it might have occurred. After hearing a verbal account of her experiences, Charles Wesley reassured her that she had indeed been justified at a particular date and time.[327]

One consequence of this uncertainty was that many conversion narratives blatantly defied a linear progression, pouring out detailed descriptions of the seemingly infinite highs and lows of evangelical experience. Bruce Hindmarsh writes of Elisabeth Hinsom's narrative that while we might expect a leveling off after a time, "we find that this experience of anxiety and relief is repeated, and as readers we are left wondering, like peeling back layers of an onion, whether we have yet reached the core of her conversion." Stories like this affirm the impression that "conversion was, in the 1740s, an unstable compound."[328]

During this period, writers also wrestled with feelings and behaviors they felt were incompatible with a godly lifestyle. The more exigent they became with their ideals, the more reprehensible their offenses seemed. They spoke in terms of trials and temptations, which were typically attributed to the devil and his desire to lure them away from God and the Methodists. This struggle with the devil often took the form of verbal dialogue that further confused Methodists by offering false logic and throwing them into "reasonings." Having been thrown off course, Methodists described themselves as lost

[327] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[328] Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 158-59.

and restless. Elizabeth Sais compared herself to Noah's dove, "find[ing] no rest till I was again taken into the ark."[329] While Elizabeth Downes exceptionally saw her restlessness as the product of God's spirit moving and working in her soul, most followed Mrs. Plat in crediting the devil: "the enemy assaulted me in this manner so that I wandered from place to place seeking rest but finding none."[330]

Like the pre-converted state, this struggle with false beliefs and confusion was for many Methodists a time of darkness, as they found the blackness and obscurity of hell and damnation much too close for comfort. For Elizabeth Hinsom, this darkness was almost a physical sensation: "I resond to much about it that I brought my self into dearknes, even dearknes wich mite be feelt."[331] Joseph Humphreys testified not only to the darkness of the devil, but also to the fundamental incompatibility between the devil and true sight. He wrote to Charles Wesley, "If I should ever hear any one call you a devil, I would say, 'Your words then were not the words of one who had a devil. Could a devil open the eyes of the blind?'"[332]

If the devil was unable to provide sight, he was very effective at clouding the consciences of early Methodists and creating paranoia about his presence. Elizabeth Sais wrote, "I had great convictions, insomuch that when I went to bed I feared I should be in hell before the morning. I was afraid to go to prayer for fear of the devil, who I thought was in every corner of the house."[333] Just before the moment of his conversion, Thomas

[329] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[330] Elizabeth Downes to Charles Wesley, 13 April 1742, EMV 53 and Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10.
[331] Elizabeth Hinsom to Charles Wesley, 25 May 1740, EMV 2.
[332] Joseph Humphreys to Charles Wesley, 3 December 1741, EMV 89.
[333] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.

Hanby found himself praying in a dark place, "greatly terrified for fear I should see the devil."[334] A few unlucky souls did have the misfortune of seeing the devil. During her period of conviction, Margerit Austin experienced a vision while reading: "I saw the devill in my soul, so that I cryed out, 'O Christ, do not lett me go.'"[335]

James Flewitt wrote of two notable experiences worth recounting in full. He recalled of his period of restlessness, "Much about that time, I dream'd I see my own apparition, which the devil & carnal people told me was a sure sign of my death, & in one sense so it was, for that dream being sanctified to me was one means of my dying to sin." This first apparition was "but the begining of sorrows." Flewitt continued:

> Soon after this, just after I got into bed one night, I was all of a sudden struck to all apearance with sudden death. O, who can tell, but them that has felt the same, the horror & confusion that I was in. Death, I thought, sit hovering upon my cold lips & hell open'd ready to receieve me. The terrors of the Lord was sit in array against me & in this agony I lay for some time in a manner speechless. Att last the Lord gave me utterrance, & I said the Lord's Prayer. I pray'd earnestly for Christ's sake that I might not dye then. I promis'd obedience to all his commands, how I would keep his Sabbaths & walk in his ordinances. I thought I never would offend him in thought, word or deed any moore. All this I promist in my own strength. So ignorant was I of the ways of God, this fit a little abated & I lay tell morning. But the fear of death was so fallen upon me, & the arrows of the almighty stuck so fast in my side that I was not able to look up.[336]

It is interesting how Flewitt framed his visual experiences, conveying real terror while maintaining a safe distance from the apparitions themselves. He did not *actually* see his ghost, rather he saw it in a dream. He was not *actually* struck with death, rather he was struck "to all apearance." Death did not *actually* sit upon his cold lips, rather he *thought* it to be the case. At the same time, he used vivid descriptors to present the visualizations

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[334] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 2, 56.
[335] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[336] James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.

as profoundly tangible, tactile experiences: arrows stuck fast in the side, speechless agony, the near-sensation of death hovering over cold lips.

Within eighteenth-century culture, physical sight played an essential role in the apprehension of truth, the perception of things unseen became suspect. Shane McCorristine observes that in the mid-eighteenth century, the phenomenon of ghost-seeing was transferred from religion to medicine. What had previously been accepted as a legitimate sight was now considered as "a fallacious perception that impinged upon the mind and tricked the experiencing subject into seeing something that was not really there.[337] Despite this increasing psychologization of supernatural visions, early Methodism still valued spiritual sights, provided that they were a product of God and not one's own imagination. Thus, Flewitt rejected the "carnal" wisdom that the dream foreshadows his own physical death, interpreting his "sanctified" dream as a sign of his death to sin. The concept of dying to oneself (at least to one's worldly self) was supported by numerous scripture passages, hymn texts and sermons that would have been familiar to early Methodists. For instance, in a sermon preached at least twenty-one times between 1738 and 1739, Charles Wesley illustrated the "natural state" of humanity as "a state of mere sin and death" in which all have died with Adam. He persistently compared the unconverted Christian to a dead body devoid of faculties for apprehending God.[338] Those who had entered a state of convictions became aware for the first time of their dead state, as represented graphically by the visualizations they experienced.

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[337] Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 32.
[338] CWS, 135-37.

Evangelical preachers stoked the imagination, encouraging audience members to see themselves as characters in biblical texts. George Whitefield was particularly adept at this, and many writers recalled vividly the texts preached and the feelings evoked by those texts. After being unable to hear Whitefield the first time she attempted to see him in Moorefields, Sarah Barber returned the following week to hear a sermon on Saul's persecution of the Christians. She wrote, "and therein the Lord was Pleased to Shew me I was that very Saul, and from that time I was under Conviction for Some time that I Saw nothing but hell and damnation before me and that humbled me att that time."[339] Similarly, a sermon preached by John Wesley at Fetter Lane led Nathaniel Hurst to identify with Lazarus in the eleventh chapter of John's gospel: "I found my self that Lazarus whom he spake of. I was all of a tremble, for my bones shook as if they would part from my flesh."[340]

Identification with biblical characters became a hallmark of evangelical awakenings, as writer after writer recalled with detail the specific texts they heard, their impressions, and their newfound connection with familiar characters. Margerit Austin is an extreme example of such identification, whether because of her extraordinary memory or her impressionable imagination. This single mother of two children, abandoned by her abusive husband, found herself identifying with the rich man of the gospel who stored up his treasures on earth. Again, upon hearing Whitefield preach about Saul's persecution of the saints, she was similarly affected as Sarah Barber, "finding my self to be the very person." Yet again through a sermon of Whitefield, she saw herself to be "half beast and

[339] Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley, May 1740, EMV 7.
[340] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15.

half devil." After hearing Mr. Delamot preach on the sower, she found her heart to be the stony ground.[341] Indeed, parts of her spiritual account read like a laundry list of biblical characters with whom she self-identified.

In his popular sermon on the pharisee and the publican, Charles Wesley invited hearers to place themselves within the story, to see themselves in the parable "as in a glass."[342] In this way, the story served not only to illuminate a historic truth—it also reflected one's very present and very personal circumstances. Through the story, one's own self-perception became altered. Identification with biblical texts also intensified the intimacy of the preacher-hearer relationship, heightening the sense that the message is intended specifically "for me." Mary Thomas recalled a sermon of Charles Wesley at the New Room: "The chapter you was on was concerning the woman taken in adultery, and the Lord said unto her, 'Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more.' The word seemed as spoken to me. I knew not where I was for a short time. I felt such a heft go of my heart that I cannot express it."[343]

Vision of the vile self

Evangelical preaching encouraged individuals to enter personally into scriptural stories and metaphors, to see themselves in the place of biblical characters. It also challenged audience members to look closely at themselves and their hearts, to turn their gaze inward and take in the sight of the vile self that the preacher could already see. Part of the effectiveness of this experience, as for other evangelical messages and practices,

[341] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[342] CWS, 270.
[343] Mary Thomas to Charles Wesley, 24 May 1742, EMV 128.

may be attributed to its novelty. Sister Ibison wrote of her "wicked hart" that "I near sow it befor. For befor this day I was well."[344]

Some early writers used the sight of the self rather abstractly as a metaphor. After beginning "to take a serious review of [his] past life and present situation with regard to eternity," Peter Jaco found his eyes to be "truly opened… I saw myself a poor, naked, helpless sinner, without any plea but 'God be merciful to me.'"[345] Katharine Gilbert wrote similarly, "I can Now see what I am by Nature and Desves Nothing but Damnation."[346] In these instances, the sight of the self referred to a new understanding of the self rather than an explicitly visual experience.

Others described more elaborate visual representations and the accompanying feelings of fear, shame and self-loathing. After having heard that "in our best we had eaten and drunk damnation, and that we were but moral devils," Mary Jane Ramsay wrote that "I saw my self so black that I thought I must not go to the Lord's table any more… I was frighted and saw my self in such a manner that I loathed my self."[347] Joseph Carter recalled, "Then did I plainly see my own vileness, my own nothingness, & I saw nothing upon the face of the earth so vile as my self, & in particular I saw my self worse than the dirt I trod on. & for this reason Jesus Christ died."[348]

Still others wrote very specifically of seeing the wicked heart. Richard Rodda visualized his heart as a "sink of pollution," while Margarit Austin's heart was cast as a

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[344] Sister Ibison to Charles Wesley, 23 May 1740, EMV 8.
[345] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 2, 9.
[346] Katharine Gilbert to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 6.
[347] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[348] Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 17.

leper "sick from head to foot."[349] Early writers often found themselves stunned at the proximity of perdition; these images transformed evil from a distant threat to an embodied (or near-embodied) reality. Nathaniel Hurst recalled when "the Lord began to show me my heart, and that there was a hell within me. For some times, as I was standing, I used to think that the ground whereon I stood was hot under me, which made me almost to tremble and to think if the ground should open and swallow me up, I should perish for ever."[350]

These vile likenesses are even more fascinating when considered in light of early eighteenth-century portrait theory. "Likeness," at this time, signified not a striking physical resemblance to the subject, but rather a flattering representation of the "general character," expressing "not so much ideas as ideals." [351] Thus, the process of identifying the image with the subject was "culturally determined… We have to know what the face means in order to identify it." [352] In this way, the vile visualizations of the self functioned a bit like iconography in reverse. Subjects of Orthodox iconography are depicted according to their spiritual nature, as "each sensory organ has played its part in the way the saint has appropriated the grace of God and has in the process itself been sanctified.[353] The image of the vile self, considered for the moment as an artistic expression, depicted the subject according to its damned nature, representing not reception of divine grace, but indeed rejection of it.

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[349] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 4, 195 and Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[350] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15.
[351] Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *The Georgians: Eighteenth-Century Portraiture and Society* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990), 30.
[352] Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 81.
[353] Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 54.

One may, at first glance, be tempted to write off the sight of the self as yet another terrifying image heaping fear upon fear, intensifying the dread of judgment, part of the seemingly never-ending period of conviction. It would appear, however, that this visualization fulfilled a particular function within the salvific process. Something about this image stimulated a change. It was as if individuals reached a point of no return, a point at which the "necessity of being a new creature" took hold.[354]

Writing to his godson, Methodist preacher William Seward exhorted:

> till you are truly poor in spirit and know that you are nothing, have nothing and can do nothing without Jesus Christ, till you see yourself a lost and undone sinner being wretched, miserable, blind and naked, full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, having no whole part about you – I say, till you thus see and feel yourself a sinner, till you are content to be thought by others the vilest of men, till you are contented to be troden [sic] under foot of men and counted the offscouring of all things, you are not fit to be a Christian.[355]

In this roundabout way, he promoted the sight of the vile, defective self as a starting point for Christian life and health.

The spiritual significance of facing one's own image was not innovative and had indeed already been evoked by religious writers to motivate godly living. For instance, Lewis Stuckley used the metaphor of a mirror in his polemic against English professors in the seventeenth century:

> In this necessary and seasonable Gospel-Glass, there are many sad, but useful Sights for thee… I shall add no more, to perswade thee to Come and See, but this, that nothing but unwillingness to see what is here to be seen, and unperswadableness to make such improvement of such Sights, can make thy Case

[354] "O how did I rejoice when Mr. Whitefield come about to preach. O how was that spark blown up that was just a dying away. But after all this, I never see the hundredthpart of my own wicked deceitfull heart till you & your dear brother, as instruments in the hands of God, has in great measure shew'd it me. I had stopt a great away this side Jourdan. But now I see clearly the necessity of being a new creature." James Flewitt to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 14.

[355] William Seward to Scipio Africanus, 20 March 1738, DDSe 23, MARC.

> desperate. Be sure only, Before, In, and After, thy serious perusal of these Chapters, of so much worth, that thou beg earnestly of God, that he would be pleased, with some of his Sons Eye-Salve, so open thine eyes, that thou mayest see; and by his Spirit move so upon thy spirit, that thine eye may suitably affect thine heart… Let the loathsomeness of thy sins be continually before thine eyes, as thy standing dish… Let your sorrow be accompanied with detestation. See all your sins and loath them, and your selves too.[356]

Charles Wesley also preached of the necessity of seeing oneself lost in order to be found, and the conversion narratives in turn reflect this movement.[357] Mrs. Plat, for instance, found that she had "no power in [her] self to turn from[her] evil ways" until her eyes were opened to the sight of her precarious state.[358] Susannah Designe, writing in the midst of her conversion process, declared that she received daily the blessings of "shame," "confusion," and the "sight of [her] own vileness." However, unlike those who rest unawakened, she wrote, "I see it without fear and grieve without pain."[359] Her confidence and lack of fear thus served as evidence that she had begun to advance spiritually.

In certain instances, the vision of the vile self led directly to a salvific vision or experience. After hearing a sermon, Samuel Webb felt himself "filled with joy unspeakable, I had such asence of my own vileness & the love of Christ towards me that I was confounded & I had no inclination to go home any more."[360] Elizabeth Sais, for

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[356] Lewis Stuckley, *A gospel-glasse, representing the miscarriages of English professors, both in their personal and relative capacities, for which God is contending with them, by the sword, plague, &c. and (since the writing of the greatest part of the following treatise for the press) by the dreadful fire in London. Or, a call from Heaven to sinners and saints* (London: Printed for Randolph Tayler, 1667), introduction, 464, 467.
[357] CWS, 274.
[358] Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10.
[359] Susannah Designe to Charles Wesley, 18 March 1742, EMV 51.
[360] Samuel Webb to Charles Wesley, 20 November 1741, EMV 18.

example, simultaneously witnessed the humbling sight of herself and a reassuring manifestation of God's presence:

> And in the night time, I had such a view of the presence of God that humbled me to the dust. I became in his sight as a dead dog. I saw that I was in his sight less than nothing and vanity, and as a beast of the field. During my seeing the vision, the words that came to my mind were those: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee. Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand when I pass by. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts. But my face shall not be seen." So gracious a sight it was that I know not how to forget it. Rejoice, O heaven, and ye that dwell therin. Shout with joy, ye worms of the earth, for the word omnipotent's condescension in thus humbling himself to behold a sinful worm, even dust and ashes, and favouring me with such amazing love and condescension.[361]

In this case, the contrast between the wretched image of a dead dog and the glorious presence of the unseeable God served to heighten God's mercy and graciousness toward a "sinful worm" like her.

Indeed, for some writers, the vision of the self permitted one not only to see sights of judgment and damnation, but also of salvation and redemption. Mrs. Plat is an intriguing example of this, as her language blurred the line between a visualized concept and an actual salvific experience.

> Yet he was pleas'd to manifest him self unto me that night, the unworthest of all creatures, for I saw not many minutes before that I hanged as it were, by a thread over hell. & that I saw my self in a damned state & did not but expect to be in hell that night. The room where in I was appeared so dark & dismal that beard witness with my conscience. Where I must have been had not my dear saviour snatch me from the brink of the pit that moment? I had uterly perished everlastingly for which all praise, all glory be unto thee, O blessed Saviour, now hence forth forth [sic] for evermore. Amen.[362]

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[361] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[362] Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10.

Did she imagine a scene in which Christ rescued her from hell, or did she indeed believe that her soul was saved in that very moment? The phrase "as it were" seems to point to a metaphorical interpretation, while references to "that moment" and being "in hell that night" suggest she thought herself truly present in "the pit." It is difficult to arrive at a definitive answer, and perhaps it is irrelevant or even counterproductive to speculate according to a twentieth-century conception of the distinction between fiction and reality. What is clear is that Mrs. Plat saw her damned self suspended over hell shortly before seeing Christ save her from plummeting over the edge, and that she considered this experience to have effected nothing less than her salvation.

Mrs. Plat was not alone in literally "witnessing" her salvation. After receiving communion, Margerit Austin "saw Christ lay with his open side, and I thought I could see his heart bleeding for me."[363] Similarly, the ten-year-old Martha Boughey "saw (as in a vision) our saviour on the cross, and also took notice of his bleeding hands, and how the blood ran down his pierced side, and therefore she s'd, 'I know my sins are forgiven me.'"[364] Indeed, for many writers, a vision of Christ interceding, bleeding, dying specifically *for them* was the experience that finally provided the long-awaited relief and assurance of faith. The experience of George Shadford neatly illustrates several common themes of this stage in the conversion process. While hearing a Methodist preacher in a farm house in 1762, he was moved to cry out, "'God be merciful to me a sinner!' No sooner had I expressed these words," he wrote,

[363] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[364] The Experience of Martha Boughey of Bolton, John Bennet Letter Book, MARC.

> but by the eye of faith (not with my bodily eyes) I saw Christ, my Advocate, at the right hand of God, making intercession for me. I believed He loved me, and gave Himself for me. In an instant the Lord filled my soul with divine love, as quick as lightning – so suddenly did the Lord whom I sought come to His temple. Immediately my eyes flowed with tears and my heard with love. Tears of joy and sorrow ran mingled down my cheeks. O what sweet distress was this! … As I walked home along the streets I seemed to be in Paradise. When I read my bible it seemed an entirely new book. When I meditated on God and Christ, angels or spirits, when I considered good or bad men, any or all the creatures which surrounded me on every side, everything appeared new, and stood in a new relation to me. I was in Christ a new creature; old things were done away and all things became new.[365]

For George Shadford and others who witnessed Christ (whether crucified or not), the sight of Christ impressed upon them the idea that Christ took a personal interest in them. The notion that Christ died *because of me* served to awaken the guilty conscience, while the notion that Christ died *for me* overwhelmed the individual with the incomprehensibility of such love and mercy. It is this sense of undeserved compassion that finally enabled transformation. Historian Joanna Cruickshank has written perceptively about the sight of the suffering Christ and resulting sympathetic responses that lead to transformation. She even goes so far as to claim that within the theology of Charles Wesley, "the relationship between sight and spiritual transformation is so significant that, without the sight of Jesus's suffering, such change is not possible."[366] There are certainly plenty of early writers who did experience transformation without having had a dramatic vision, but it does seem fair to say that even without an explicit vision of Christ suffering, early Methodists confronted the image of Jesus in hymns, sermons, journals and holy conversation. The experience of witnessing Christ's

[365] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 2, 182-84.
[366] Cruickshank, "'Appear as Crucified,'" 326.

suffering, the conviction that one contributed to that suffering and the incomprehensibility of divine love in spite of that suffering often combined to produce the long-awaited transformation.

One effect of this transformation was the activation of the spiritual eye. George Shadford saw fit to specify that he received his vision through the "eye of faith (*not with my bodily eyes*)."[367] Other Methodists were similarly quick to point out that their experience resulted not from a physical or mental condition, but from a spiritual one.[368] Elizabeth Downes wrote to Charles Wesley of her vision of Christ, "so did I clearly behold him with the eye of faith… that my soul was filled with devout raptures. Sir, itt was no… imagination."[369] Cruickshank observes Wesley's preference for "an interior, imaginative, spiritual sight" over "the potential of physical sight."[370] Early writers specified that the visions perceived with the spiritual eye were not mere fabrications of the imagination, but that they were in fact perceptions of a new spiritual reality.

At the end of the excerpt from George Shadford's experience, he spoke about the world around him appearing new. A number of other writers also spoke evocatively about the moment of receiving their new eyes. This experience was very much a resurrection, a death to the self and a new birth into the realm of light. Elizabeth Bristow exulted:

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[367] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 2, 183 (emphasis mine).
[368] "That moment Jesus Christ was as evidently set before the eye of my mind, as crucified for my sins, as if I had seen Him with my bodily eyes: and in that instant my heart was set at liberty from guilt and tormenting fear, and filled with a calm and serene peace." Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 2, 16. Also Margerit Austin to CW, "I received your words as coming from [my Saviour's] mouth; and with the eye of faith I again saw my pardon, written in his blood." CWJ, vol. 1, 5 April 1740, 234.
[369] Elizabeth Downes to Charles Wesley, 13 April 1742, EMV 53.
[370] Cruickshank, "'Appear as Crucified," 329.

> He hath tooken the scales off my eyes. … I am not ashamed to say I sat by the way side beging, and as Jesus passed by, I recived my sight. … O behold a miracle indeed! A greater one nun if a dead body had been raised out of the earth. I was dead in… sin, and Jesus raised me. He brought me from the pitt of hell into the kingdon of light. Flesh and blood hath not reveal'd this to me, but the spirit of God which dwelleth in me.[371]

Not only did early conversion narratives cite stories of Jesus restoring sight in the gospels—they also mimicked the miracle itself, thereby "reinforce[ing] the metaphoric equivalence between seeing and faith, between blindness and the refusal to believe."[372]

It was while reading a chapter of Romans, as encouraged by Charles Wesley, that Mariah Price received her spiritual sight. She recalled,

> But as I was a reading, I think it was the sixth chapter, I was forced to lift my eys of the book and look about me. I was like a person that was born blind, and that moment recvied light. I wondered I so often read and never understood before. I was almost lost with wonder at my new eys… I recvied such sight as I never had before, I as planly felt a burden taken of my heart, as I could feel one took of my back.[373]

This kind of language displayed striking similarities to contemporary stories of blind persons receiving physical sight following cataract surgery. In an essay on blindness and Enlightenment, literary scholar Kate Tunstall remarks that early eighteenth-century "cataract narratives present the recovery of sight as a coming back to life… To see is, these stories suggest, not only to be alive, but also to know oneself to be so."[374] If, as Marita Amm suggests, "the eye is equivalent to the person and sufficient to identify a subject," then new eyes signify in fact a new person, a new being.[375] Having struggled with the fear of death, confronted the limitations of the physical senses and come face to

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[371] Elizabeth Bristow to Charles Wesley, 12 April 1740, EMV 11.
[372] Paulson, *Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France*, 7.
[373] Mariah Price to Charles Wesley, 18 May 1740, EMV 12.
[374] Kate E. Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment: An Essay* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 3.
[375] Amm, "Might and Magic, Lust and Language," 226.

face with suffering and death, the converts finally emerged with new eyes for witnessing a new reality.

Echoing sermons and biblical texts heard during group events, many Methodists wrote of this first rapture as having been "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light," "out of the bondage of corruption" into liberty from sin.[376] Elizabeth Sais, for instance, envisioned herself as a newly-released captive. She recounted hearing John Wesley at Temple Backs asking if anyone in the crowd felt themselves to be in need of a savior.

> In speaking which words on some others to that effect, he fastened his eyes on me and applied himself to me as though he had known my desperate case, and offered salvation to us so fervently till at least I received it in such a manner as I never expected. I felt in my inmost soul that I was forgiven. I was as if I was flying on the wings of love up to my saviour's breast. The angel of the Lord came upon me and a marvellous light shone into my prison, and my chains fell off.[377]

Others found that the light enabled them to see their personal relations anew. William Barber marveled that under the "devine light… I find my love so enlarged that I can say with open armes of charity embreacing all mankind."[378] Christopher Hopper likewise exclaimed, "God, Christ, angels, men, heavne, earth, and the whole creation appeared to me in a new light, and stood related to me in a manner I never knew before. I

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[376] "I cannot doubt of this great salvation since it is so clearly spoken of in the old and new testament. The light shineth and if men did not love darkness rather than light, they must perceive it. But blessed be that God who has shown us the light and bid us walk in it. And may we never provoke him to withdraw it. May we walk in the light, as God is in the light and feel the blood of Jesus Christ clense in us from all sin. Joseph Humphreys: I had tasted of the grace of our Lord before, but never so clearly saw his face till then. Surely I then walked in the light, and the candle of the Lord shone upon my soul. Christ in all his fulness was then reveal'd unto me." Eliza Mann to Charles Wesley, January 1742, EMV 107.
[377] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[378] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 20.

found love to my God, to His yoke, to His crow, to His saints, and to His friends and enemies."[379]

The experiences of receiving new sight reflected and contributed to the popular notion that resurrected saints would be physically and mentally perfected, and that their senses would be "gloriously refreshed."[380] The new birth of conversion thus foreshadowed the coming back to life of resurrection, as the death and rebirth of the spirit precede that of the body.

Post-conversion

What, then, was the fate of these early Methodist writers following conversion? Many of the lay accounts were written in the fervor of one's "first love," as it was called, with no further traces to be found. In other cases, we can see from later correspondence and membership lists that some lay people became integrated members or established leaders of Methodist societies. But even when such evidence presents itself, it does not necessarily reveal the same depth of spiritual detail as the original narrative. There was, unfortunately, no mass follow-up campaign on the part of Charles Wesley, and the preachers' accounts were one-time publications intended to serve as exemplars for others. There are, however, a few hints provided in the narratives themselves. Some like Naomi Thomas and Joseph Humphreys found themselves already at the time of writing walking again in darkness and blindness, seeking glimpses of light and fresh visions of Christ and

[379] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 1, 118.
[380] Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105, 109.

of their own hearts.[381] Joseph Carter recalled his "first love" as a time when he enjoyed "comunion with the father and the son continualy" and "fellowship with the saints that were in the light," and lamented, "O that I could as incessantly say so now as then!"[382] Taverner Wallis similarly remembered a time of "looking unto him whom I had peirced… but now these things seem to be forgoten and I seem ignorent that so it is, I seem quit blind to what I was formerly."[383]

From these accounts, it seems that many early Methodists found it nearly impossible to sustain the fervor and certainty of their conversion. While Methodist theology accommodated "backsliding," or periods of regression along the spiritual journey, many writers continued to look longingly over their shoulder toward conversion and its afterglow. Others continued on, steadily progressing in faith day by day, calmly accepting the ebbs and flows along the progression of spiritual growth. From the time of his initial conversion, wrote Thomas Cooper, "the Lord shous mee deeper & deeper into my heart, and after the Lord hath shouen me my heart, then he lets mee feel is love. And so I go on from one step to another."[384] In a letter to Charles Wesley written twenty years after his conversion narrative, William Barber wrote that he continued to receive "larger degree[s]" of divine light and love. He prayed that he might continue to see himself as "poor and vile in my own eyes… that I may be nothing, that Christ may be all in all."[385]

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[381] Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129 and Joseph Humphreys to Charles Wesley, 3 December 1741, EMV 89.
[382] Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 17.
[383] Taverner Wallis to Charles Wesley, 24 November 1741, EMV 19.
[384] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[385] William Barber to Charles Wesley, 27 December 1762, EMV 23.

Closing reflections

In this chapter, I have addressed the role of sight and seeing in the early Methodist conversion narrative. In doing so, I have tried to remain faithful to the voices of Methodist laity. Their accounts reveal a rich visual vocabulary and strong visual experiences that reflected, informed and challenged a sense of the self, leading through darkness, death and despair into light, life and love. Drawing on language acquired through public preaching events, intimate conversations and written material circulated throughout the Methodist societies, early Methodist writers presented their journeys as a coming back to sight. Along this journey toward spiritual perception, many witnessed visual representations of themselves, of the devil and of Christ. Though it is perhaps easier to speak of these experiences as "visions," many Methodists themselves resisted this terminology. Conscious of "how manipulable the senses are, how easily deceived," they used the phrases "as it were," "as if" "as in a vision" to distance themselves from purely imaginative and therefore false visions.[386] For them, these visualizations offered glimpses of spiritual truths and thus of a reality more authentic than the world perceived with physical eyes.

The complication lies in the difficulty of corroborating such experiences. While physical sight enjoyed a privileged position with regard to verification of truths, spiritual sight erred on the side of hallucinations and other fictions of the imagination. Methodists did indeed struggle to discern between true and false impressions, and certainly some

[386] Amm, "Might and Magic, Lust and Language," 228.

appeared to cross the border into objectionable territory. William Briggs complained to Charles Wesley in 1762 that he was "concerned for the honour of God and the reputation of our society":

> There are 7 at the other end of the town who meet in a dark room to see visions, as if they could not see as well with their eyes shut at noon day as with their eyes open without any light at all! Whether these are males or females or both I could not learn. They have called upon a lame man to arise and walk, and afterwards to blind John to open his eyes and see, but without effect, which they heavily charged to the patients account, as wanting faith to be healed!

Briggs lamented that this "obstinate folly" was the natural consequence of "weak heads [being] filled with a perswasion of having a peculiar gift from above."[387]

The experience of Joseph Cownley, published in the *Arminian Magazine* in 1794, incorporated visual language similar to that found in the lay narratives: "The darkness vanished away from his soul, and the Sun of righteousness arose with healing in His wings. He was filled with divine joy, pleasure smiled in his eyes, and heaven reigned in his heart." Even though Cownley did not have an explicitly visual experience, the editor felt it necessary to add the following disclaimer:

> Mr. Cownley was far from being a visionary: it was not from these impressions alone that he drew conclusions of the divine favour; he had surer grounds. Peace and hope succeeded anguish and fear, and the love of God was shed abroad in his heart, accompanied with the most indubitable evidence that the change he felt, and the work wrought in him, was of God. Nothing less than this could satisfy a mind so well informed and so anxious to avoid every deception.[388]

The twin pressures of rationality and respectability eventually moved visual experiences out of the realm of the commonplace into that of the exceptional, a move likely hastened by skepticism of self-proclaimed prophets and seemingly extravagant

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[387] William Briggs to Charles Wesley, 10 November 1762, DDPr 1/11, MARC.
[388] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 4, 125-26.

claims of those who had supposedly attained "perfection." At the outset, however, Methodist leadership took a rather neutral stance, which permitted many early Methodists to write meaningfully about their desire for spiritual perception and the sights that confronted them along the way.[389]

I close with an excerpt from Thomas Olivers, who, despite his rationalist tendencies, continued to hold in his memory one extraordinary experience that occurred just after receiving his admittance ticket to a Methodist society:

> As I returned home, just as I came to the bottom of the hill at the entrance of the town, a ray of light, resembling the shining of a star, descended through a small opening in the heavens, and instantaneously shone upon me. In that instant my burden fell off, and I was so elevated that I felt as if I could literally fly away to heaven. This was the more surprising to me as I had always been (what I still am) so prejudiced in favour of rational religion as not to regard visions or revelations, perhaps, so much as I ought to do. But this light was so clear, and the sweetness and other effects attending it were so great, that, though it happened about twenty-seven years ago, the several circumstances thereof are as fresh on my remembrance as if they had happened but yesterday.[390]

[389] "Q. 16. Do we not discourage visions and dreams too much? As if we condemned them toto genere? A. We do not intend to do this: [we neither discourage nor encourage them]. We learn from Acts ii. 19, &c., to expect something of this kind in the last days. And we cannot deny that saving faith is often given in dreams or visions in the night, which faith we account neither better nor worse than if it come by any other means." CM, 2 August 1745, 22.

[390] Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, vol. 1, 210.

CHAPTER FOUR

ENTHUSIASTIC BODIES

"It is heart work to be born again." –Mrs. Plat[391]

Figure 4. Methodist class members exulting in their "sweet" feelings

From top left: Class leader: "O charming Comforts, glorious news yt one more is brought into X's fould. Prase ye lord. I thought thare was Sumthing more then Comon by ye Prayer." Man with devil: "Blessed by God, for I have Found ye Blessing. I Feal his Sperit now in my Hart & now I feal my Sins Forgiven." Woman: "O Glory be to god for I have had a Swete meting. I have felt Charming Comforts. I have not felt Such a Swete blessing this Half year before." Woman: "O Brother Roberts has made a Chaming [sic]

[391] Mrs. Plat, EMV.

Prayer & have found ye blessing. We have had an uncoman blessing." Man with stick: "god be Prasd yt one more is made a child of god." Two women at bottom of page: "Pray Brother Roberts Come to my Class."

Introduction

One of the chief facets of early Methodist theology—as well as one of the most contentious—lies in its insistence upon the possibility (and indeed the necessity) of a direct encounter with God. As has been explored in previous chapters, divine encounter sometimes led to unexpected impulses and revelations. Early Methodists found their lips suddenly opened or closed, depending upon the origin of the supernatural influence. They heard voices and witnessed unprecedented visions. This chapter turns its attention to the remaining bodily manifestations that accompanied spiritual experiences: losing (or nearly losing) one's senses, weeping, trembling and convulsions. Such behaviors did not fail to attract critique, and Methodist leaders were sometimes hard-pressed to negotiate their stance on the matter. Historians of Methodism have similarly struggled to maintain neutrality when touching upon the more demonstrative aspects of Methodist spirituality, often minimizing or avoiding the matter altogether. For instance, the anonymous author of *John Wesley the Methodist* claims that John never encouraged such phenomena, but instead made every effort to control them.[392] Taking another tactic, John Birrell tries to distinguish between cases of "mere emotional disturbance" and genuinely sound conversions.[393] Henry Rack observes that historians who are Methodist "have naturally

[392] J. F. Hurst, *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of his Life and Work* (New York and Cincinnati: Eaton & Mains, 1903), 111.
[393] Augustine Birrell, *John Wesley: Some Aspects of the Eighteenth Century in England* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 133.

tended to emphasise the reasonableness and sobriety of their founder and his followers," downplaying the "elements of irrationality and what some will see as religious hysteria… Non-methodists have been less reticent."[394]

This study aims not to pass judgment upon religious behavior, but rather to understand it from the perspective of the practitioners themselves. Did early Methodists consider physical manifestations to be essential, dispensable or distasteful? The responses will naturally depend upon the disposition of each individual at the time of writing. Some severe critics later experienced dramatic conversions themselves, while other early adherents later became disenchanted and disgusted with Methodism. For the purposes of this study, the fluidity of the movement does not lessen the significance of its influence (however long or brief) upon the lives of early writers. To attempt to determine the "success" of a conversion is a religious estimation, not an historical one. It is hoped that this exploration of lay experience will help to balance the substantial work that has already been done on Methodist leaders and Methodist critics.[395] In order to approach this "insider's perspective," however, this chapter will begin from the "outside"—first offering some impressions from non-Methodists who flatly rejected the more extreme behaviors, then moving to those leaders and adherents who struggled to make up their mind, and finally on to the lay narratives themselves.

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[394] Henry D. Rack, "Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing" in *The Church and Healing: Papers Read at the Twentieth Summer Meeting and the Twenty-First Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. W. J. Shiels (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 137.

[395] See, for example, Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthuasiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989); Brett C. McInelly, *Textual Warfare and the Making of Methodism*); and Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*.

View from the outside

When looking at the spiritual practices of early Methodists, Bishop Lavington witnessed some shocking behaviors: "Shriekings, Roarings, Groanings, Gnashings, Yellings, Cursings, Blasphemies and Despairings."[396] An anonymous critic was taken aback by "frightfull shrieks and groans and other ridiculous gestures," as well as "falling into divers strange postures."[397] Augustine Birrell claims that early Methodist conversions were

> calculated to give the idea of a sudden, painful and violent process… the effect was that of a shock, assault or collision. The convert fell as though he was knocked over by the blow of a cudgel: one moment he was gaping at the preacher, and the next, he was down on the floor, with two or three stout fellows trying to keep him quiet.[398]

Ronald Knox offers a more detailed précis of symptoms resulting from a "deliberate prayer-technique":

> There is a cry, or a roar; usually (not always) the afflicted person drops to the ground; you can see that he or she is something in the position of the demoniac healed after the Transfiguration; Satan is letting his prey go, with the utmost reluctance. The bystanders fall to prayer; if there is no immediate deliverance the interrupter is carried out, and prayer goes on, often till late at night. We do not hear, commonly at least, of people foaming at the mouth; but in these as in other cases of religious convulsions we are often told that it took so many strong men to hold the energumen down. (Six or seven in the case of Thomas Maxfield.)[399]

From these other similar accounts, it appears that physical manifestations were a visible feature of Methodist spirituality, particularly during (but not limited to) the Bristol

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[396] George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared in Three Parts*, vol. 3 (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1754), 23.
[397] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 31 May 1740, EMV 144.
[398] Birrell, *John Wesley*, 136.
[399] Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 521-22.

revival of 1739-1741. This period coincided with the window in which most of the spiritual accounts solicited by Charles Wesley were written.

According to John Kent, the driving force behind the early Methodist movement was its "passionate hunger for access to invisible powers, and so for ways of changing the life and prosperity of the adherent."[400] These two factors—direct access to the divine and mobility within the social order—subjected Methodism to serious critique and skepticism from the general public. Both aspects converged under the heading of "enthusiasm." The term "enthusiasm" was employed to describe a wide range of behavior, from the promulgation of false or mistaken ideas to frenzied physical outbursts during worship and seemingly mad (irrational) behavior.

Brett McInelly explains that Methodist flirtation with the supernatural implied "the surrender of one's rational faculties and the possibility of a direct encounter with unreason and, by extension, insanity."[401] Perhaps madness, like beauty, resides in the eye of the beholder. George Whitefield wrote in his journal of a man who had been committed to the madhouse. The chief reasons for his admission seemed to be these: 1) fasting for almost a fortnight; 2) praying "so as to be heard four Story high;" and 3) selling his clothes and giving them to the poor. As historian Roy Porter observes, "To Georgian churchmen this was crazy; once it would have been holy."[402]

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[400] John Kent, *Wesley and Wesleyans: Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.
[401] Brett C. McInelly, "Method or Madness: Methodist Devotion and the Anti-Methodist Response" in Kathryn Duncan, ed., *Religion in the Age of Reason: A Transatlantic Study of the Long Eighteenth Century* (Brooklyn, NY: AMS Press, 2009), 196.
[402] Quoted in ibid., 204-5.

If Methodism was an isolated sect, engaged in odd practices but otherwise kept to itself, it may have avoided some of its strongest critiques. Opponents were concerned not only about potential theological aberrations, but also about serious ramifications upon the social order as a whole. It was considered madness to step out of one's destined role in society or to disturb the flow of conventional family life. Women were particularly singled out for disrupting the family by spending so much time at Methodist activities. The *Gentleman's Magazine* complained that "many silly women" were neglecting their children and families every day, "contrary to the Laws of Nature."[403]

In developing such strong ties to Methodist leaders, bands and societies, laity did sometimes consider Methodism as an alternative family. Indeed, several early writers commented on the significance of these relationships. Susannah Designe confessed to Charles Wesley, "I find greater ties, both of love and duty to your brother and you than my natural parents after the flesh."[404] Similarly, J. Purdy wrote to John Wesley, "I did'nt think it till now, but I believe I love you as well as I do my papa."[405]

For some, Methodism became their sole support system after their "natural" families and acquaintances abandoned them because of their evangelical activities. After the death of her husband, Sister Mecham's in-laws treated her kindly. Once she began frequenting the Foundery, however, "they then sent for her to ask if she intended to

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[403] Quoted in Henry Abelove, "The Sexual Politics of Early Wesleyan Methodism" in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, eds. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), 93.
[404] Susannah Designe to Charles Wesley, 18 March 1742, EMV 51.
[405] J. Purdy to John Wesley, 23 June 1739, Letters to John Wesley box 1, MARC.

continue with the Methodists.[406] She told them she hoped that the day she left them, that God would require her soul from her body. And from that day, they all forsook her."[407] J. Purdy struggled between her loyalty to the Methodists and her love for her father. She poured out her distress in a letter to John Wesley:

> In short I said everything that I could get nothing but reiterated commands never to hear you again. And yet I love this cruel, this inexorable father with such tenderness that I haven't fortitude to leave him, tho' I fear I shall always be unhappy with him, to give him pain, to disoblidge him for ever, never to see him more, 'tis worth than death. Oh! Dear Mr. Wesley, advise me, pray for me, pray that the whole streams of my affections may be turn's into another channel. What shall I do?[408]

According to lay writings, Methodists tended to be abandoned first by society rather than the other way around. Few were so enraptured with the evangelical movement that they would voluntarily quit their families and vocations altogether. Samuel Webb served as an exception. After hearing Charles Wesley preach at the Foundery, he was so "rejoyced" that he left journey work to have "better leusure to attend."[409]

In addition to the changes in social behaviors witnessed by critics, enthusiastic behavior during worship also attracted its fair share of attention. According to the critics, such unseemly behavior was objectionable for several reasons. For some, it ran contrary to the typical workings of the Holy Spirit. On May 21, 1740, an anonymous critic heard Howell Harris cite Peter's conversion of 3,000 people and the story of the "trembling jaylor" to "justifie these strange methods." Ten days later, the critic wrote to the

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[406] The Foundery became the primary Methodist meeting place in London after divisions within the Fetter Lane Society led to a split between its members in 1739.
[407] The Experience of Sister Mecham, 1765, EMV 110.
[408] J. Purdy to John Wesley, 4 June 1739, Letters to John Wesley box 1, MARC.
[409] Samuel Webb to Charles Wesley, 20 November 1741, EMV 18.

"ministers cald Methodists" arguing that such biblical conversions always followed "some miraculous circumstances," and that ordinarily, "the dew of the Holy Ghost falls in mild and gentle showers… not in storms of sundry violent passions, and other foolish and wild extravagancies."[410] In 1739, Joshua Read wrote John Wesley in response to "a strange and even a surprizing account" of the effects of John's ministry in Bristol. Like the anonymous critic, Read put forward the idea of "common" and "special" means by which the Holy Spirit convinces people of sin. He affirmed that "God's ordinary way of working" with individuals is "by bringing 'em under a spirit of bondage by the law, before he lovingly reveals his Christ and his covenant to their souls by the spirit of adoption." Read expressed concern that dramatic symptoms would not necessarily yield lasting results.[411]

Critics were also concerned that Methodism's reputation might rub off on the rest of Christianity. In May 1740, an anonymous correspondent complained to Charles Wesley about the more extreme behaviors of Methodists. He expressed concern that the "spreading infection of these false brethren" would drive away respectable would-be converts, namely atheists, libertines and deists. "By encouraging and countenancing such practices," he warned, "you will lose the good seed, which is the sincere people, and retain the chaff only, which are the hypocrites."[412] This may have been a legitimate cause for concern for some because of Methodism's insistence that it was a revival

[410] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 31 May 1740, EMV 144. In 1751, Charles noted on the letter, "He NOW seems to have much reason on his side."
[411] Joshua Read to John Wesley, 11 September 1739, Letters to John Wesley box 2, MARC.
[412] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 31 May 1740, EMV 144.

movement within the established church, and because it was influential (or at least visible) enough to attract public notice.

According to some definitions, enthusiasm consisted in false beliefs and—consequently—behaviors borne out of those beliefs. At best, enthusiasm took the form of a simple misunderstanding. At worst, it fostered devious and blasphemous ideas, even dangerous distortions of Christian doctrine and practice. When conceptual errors mutated into incomprehensible acts, critics attempted to diagnose in medical terms of "melancholy, mania and delusion."[413] Though Methodists may have considered their spiritual maladies as a device of Satan, or a means by which God convinced them of sin, others such as Bishop Lavington were convinced that "the greatest part of these strange feelings and sufferings, dejections of mind and dreadful apprehensions, &c, proceed from disease."[414] These critics did not fail to credit Methodist preachers for their role in exacerbating the passions of the "feeble-minded."[415] Lackington described George Whitefield's "perfect command of the passions of his audience," under which they might be roaring with laughter one moment and drowning in sorrow the next.[416] Under such influence, there was no telling what one might be led to do.

On occasion, the fears of critics were more than justified by violent and self-destructive episodes linked with Methodism. The death of William Seward was the first major event to cast a shadow on the budding movement. Branded the first Methodist

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[413] McInelly, "Method or Madness," 199.
[414] George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared in Three Parts*, vol. 1 (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1754), 39.
[415] Birrell, *John Wesley*, 129.
[416] James Lackington, *Memoirs of the First Forty-five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (London, 1792), 184.

martyr, Seward died of wounds incurred from a mob stoning in 1740. Twenty-three years later, a "polite magazine" printed a shocking report of self-mutilation performed by a woman attending a Methodist society meeting, who, "in a fit of religion made two wounds above her eyes, in order to cut them out; she cut off both her ears, her nose, her lips, both breasts, stabbed herself under the breast and cut her throat, in all eleven wounds notwithstanding which she is still alive."[417] Another publication, dubiously entitled *The Entertainer*, relayed news of a seemingly Methodist-related suicide: "On *Saturday* last, *Tom Sullen*, after having spent the whole day with a *Methodist* preacher, retired to his lodgings, said his prayers, went to bed, slept well, awaked early in the morning, settled his affairs, loaded a pistol, and blew his brains out."[418] Tragic occurrences such as these were more than enough to alert the public to the extreme results of "enthusiastic" behavior.

In 1762, William Briggs visited a Methodist meeting in Beach Lane facilitated by Mr. Bell and Mr. Maxfield. There seem to have already been reports about these meetings, as Briggs was reluctantly visiting upon the request of Charles Wesley. In his report, Briggs shared numerous complaints concerning the errant theology of the leaders and their unseemly conduct of the meeting. Among his many concerns, he was particularly irritated by the noisiness of Bell's leadership and of the audience's responses.

> He [Bell] next prayed, and soon ran into such an extraordinary strain, screaming in such a violent manner to compel a blessing upon the present meeting that he seemed to be in a rapture and in fact was as one raving agony. I could not help thinking of the Sybyl described in Dryden's Virgil and was under apprehensions

[417] *The Universal Museum, or, Gentleman's and Ladies Polite Magazine of History, Politicks and Literature for 1763*, vol. 2, 556.
[418] *The Entertainer*, no. 8 (October 22, 1754), 48.

> of seeing him fall down and with foaming mouth, wild eyes and uplifted hair, deliver a prophecy. …
>
> …in the midst of his discourse he fell into a prayer again with most surprizing familiarity and vociferation, screaming for some token of almighty power to work the mighty change in those present and adoring that goodness which had redeemed so many from all sin, giving them an assurance that they should never fall by taking away the occasion of stumbling. In the midst of this vehement supplication and praise, they fell into singing the glorious state of being free from sin.

Briggs was further scandalized when one raised his voice to challenge what had been said. Bell forbade the man to speak, but he only cried out louder. The congregation then began to sing, drowning out the voice of the "opposer." Briggs lamented, "In short, the wildness on one side, the rage of the other and uproar of all made it a scene of the most diabolical frenzy; and finding my soul opposed with sorrow and my poor weak head affected with the uproad, I quitted the place before it was half done and found a croud in the street laughing us to scorn!" He then beseeched Charles not to lay such a cross upon him again.[419]

For Briggs, this scene was distasteful not only for its unseemly clamor, but for its artificiality. He averred that Bell's "common discourse" was "low and insipid, however loud and vehement," and that it lacked the gravity that should accompany profound truths. He continued:

> But when his vociferation comes on, it is horrible beyond expressions! I thought I could distinguish a straining agony to raise himself to an admirable pitch. It was all so forced and unnatural that I could not esteem it so much as preternatural… However, I must suppose this kind of address to have an effect upon some, as manny seemed to labour with echoing groan for groan. But from the observation of many years, we are assured that the most noisey outcrye is seldom the fruit of a deep conviction.

[419] William Briggs to Charles Wesley, 28 October 1762, DDPr 1/10, MARC.

Briggs not only provided detailed observations about what was said—he also picked up on something significant that was *not* said. It is clear that he was greatly disappointed in his search for humility and reverence, for "Not one word dropt that they thought meanly of themselves!" From this, Briggs distinguished a presumption that utterly disgusted him. Whereas many early Methodists were encouraged to recognize the limitations of their humanity and the unique capacity of Jesus Christ to lead them toward salvation, the leaders of this meeting seemed to be acting instead out of "vanity or delusion." For this reason, their "vociferous" exhortations were not to be trusted. Charles Wesley's anonymous critic offered the same evaluation, observing that sincere persons exercised their faith discreetly, "lest they should be thought guilty of hypocrisy and affectation"[420] and—by extension—enthusiasm.

Methodist perspective

Matters were not necessarily more clear within Methodism itself. Leaders and participants were well aware of the extraordinary nature of certain practices, and they discussed among themselves where to draw the line. T. Mitchell reflected upon a particular episode in Newgate in 1739, in which "two were taken in the same manner, one of which could not stand for a considerable time after 'twas over." He recalled that John Wesley came down from the pulpit to pray and sing over them. Regarding public opinion, he noted: "Various reflections are scattered about on this uncommon sight. It is

[420] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 31 May 1740, EMV 144.

a common saying among the carnal and rediculing part of mankind in the open streets to ask one another if they have got the Holy Ghost."[421]

Mitchell continued with his account, informing Seward that "great things are going on here." During an evening society meeting, a woman was "delivered from the spirit of bondage and received the witness of the spirit of adoption." Though Mitchell did not specify her physical gestures, it is clear that copious tears were involved, as were vigorous praying and singing. He reported, "She continued in such agonies for near half an hour, as drawed almost the eyes of every one into tears." He recounted her struggle to give up her "armour," and rejoiced that "Christ had gotten himself the victory" in the end. In this case, the proof of conversion's efficacy appeared to be the woman's immense joy following the experience, as well as her compulsion to express thanks and praise for her deliverance.[422]

In 1748, James Fogg wrote to John Bennet to relay the experience of Mary Clagg. She had gone with two fellow "sisters" to speak with Samuel Bradley about the condition of their souls. While they were praying together, "to the great astonisment of the persons present, [she] fell flat to the chamber floor as tho' she was dead." After (and only after) the prayer was finished, Mr. Bradley helped the shaking woman to her knees, whereupon she began praising God as soon as she was able to speak. She then related the details of her experience, in which devil "struck her down to the floor." Once in this vision-state, she saw the sun, moon and stars, only ten times brighter than usual. An angel stood by her, and she asked God to bestow his favor upon all persons. The following day, Clagg

[421] T. Mitchell to William Seward, 26 April 1739, DDSe 40, MARC.
[422] Ibid.

was still "weak in body but strong in faith." Fogg reported with delight that she praised God for having heard the Methodists, "for say's she, doubtless these are the servants of God who shew unto us the way of salvation."[423] Like Mitchell, Fogg regarded the extraordinary nature of the manifestation as a sign of God's extraordinary work. Whereas for critics, the extraordinary was cause for skepticism, in these instances it seemed to confirm authenticity. As above, the spontaneous expression of praise and thanksgiving was also significant, for it demonstrated that the individual's focus had been successfully transferred from the self to the divine.

Despite these positive estimations, there remained serious concerns about over-emphasizing the role of physical manifestations. Even George Whitefield, who was famous for the extraordinary effects of his preaching, found himself shocked by the extent to which John Wesley approved of such behaviors. He wrote worriedly to John in June of 1739:

> I cannot think it right in you honored sir to give so much encouragement to those convulsions which people have been thrown into under your ministry. Was I to do so, how many would cry out every night? I think it is tempting God to require such signs. That there is something of God in it, I doubt not, but the devil I believe does interpose. I think it will encourage the French Prophets,[424] take people from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, &c. more than on the promises and precepts of the gospel. Honored sir, how could you tell that some who came to came to you "<u>were in a good measure sanctified?</u>" What fruits could be produced in one night's time? By their fruit, says our Lord, shall you know them.[425]

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[423] James Fogg to John Bennet, 9 October 1748, John Bennet Letter Book, MARC.
[424] The "French Prophets" were Camisards who arrived in England after having been persecuted in France. They became known for their prophecies and revelations which were often accompanied by dramatic physical manifestations.
[425] George Whitefield to John Wesley, 25 June 1739, Letters to John Wesley box 2, MARC.

Whitefield feared that the evidence would be taken for the means. He also threw doubt upon the possibility of verifying the effectiveness of conversion in such a short time. On this point John Wesley wavered throughout his ministry, and the debate surrounding the instantaneous nature of justification and salvation returned periodically throughout the eighteenth century.[426] Physical manifestations played a leading role in sparking such debates, as they were generally linked to the achievement of particular stages in the conversion process. In 1740, Benjamin Ingham offered his reflections on the matter to Charles Wesley. He wrote, "I know of no instance in these points of anyone being awakened, receiving remission of sins, and the full assurance of faith all at once." He explained that the "great joy" often experienced at awakening was only that—a joy "given to draw them forward."[427] As such, it was not to be confused with other stages of conversion. Ingham tried to diminish the role of feelings as an indicator of conversion, looking instead to a full conviction of sin and unbelief before forgiveness and assurance of faith can be given.

In responding to charges of enthusiasm, John Wesley attempted to retain both the importance of rational examination and the necessity of divine intervention. His responses varied according to the definition of enthusiasm being employed. John Bennet exemplified this strategy in the following reply to a critic:

> As for enthusiasm, if it be counted E. to have a possession of the spirit of God and a sensable enjoym't of his comforts, then let me live and die an enthusiast, and I wish my enemies may do so too. But if by enthusiasm you mean a false pretence

[426] William Briggs writes to John Wesley that he and Mr. Butts were surprised to hear Charles Wesley preach on the necessity of instantaneous justification and sanctification. William Briggs to John Wesley, 10 December 1762, DDPr 1/11, MARC.
[427] Benjamin Ingham to Charles Wesley, 1740, DDPr 1/50, MARC.

> to the spirit (as I suppose you do) then how will you do to know a man to be an enthusiast, if he be orthodox in faith and blameless in conversation?[428]

Like John Wesley, Bennet affirmed a "sensable" perception of God, which allowed for the bodily reception and expression of the divine. At the same time, he denied the accusation that such spiritual possession was necessarily falsely motivated. As early Methodism affirmed the presence and activity of both benevolent and malicious supernatural forces, it required both a means of distinguishing between the two and a means of combatting the forces of evil. The contest between good and evil often found its playing field in the bodies and minds of the almost-converted. What critics attributed to madness and other psychological disorders, some Methodists considered as evidence of a spiritual struggle betwixt God and the devil, the devil and the individual, or the individual and God. For them, the struggle was very real, not imagined.[429]

Lay perspective

How, then, did laity interpret their physical manifestations? Where and when did the manifestations occur? Were the laity frightened? Did they expect them, or were they completely taken aback? Did they have doubts as to the origins of their extraordinary experiences? Did they consider them a necessary component of conversion, or rather an added bonus along the way? The responses vary somewhat from individual to individual, yet there are some generalizations that can be gleaned from the early lay narratives.

In 1762, John Walsh sent to Charles Wesley his obsessively detailed 17-page spiritual account (begun three years earlier) in which he painstakingly quoted poetry,

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[428] John Bennet Letter Book, 42.
[429] See McInelly, "Method or Madness," 9.

journal entries and entire letters. While such curious precision may delight historians, it also admittedly raises some questions concerning Walsh's mental and social health. He offered numerous brief but meticulous reports of his spiritual condition and the effects of preaching upon it. An example:

> After 6 hours disorder of body and sadness of soul, I heard Mr. Davis at Tot'nam Court, 42 minutes, on Romans 8:11. I rejoiced a little most of the time with deep humility, and once with great extacy, strong assurance, tears and shaking while he uttered these and like words: "Fear not, march, go on, thy God shall go with thee through fire and water." So ended my heaviness.[430]

The majority of his accounts are comprised of tears, shaking, and extracts of carefully-timed sermons. In a quote from his own letter to Mr. Berridge, he recounted an experience he had immediately following a prayer session with Mr. Bell. While singing with Bell, he heard verses about his name being inscribed in "the lamb's book of life." Upon hearing these words, he felt "a palpitation at the bottom of [his] stomach, and a small giddyness in [his] head." After Bell had left, Walsh prayed with panting breath "from 7 o'clock till ¼ past 8," when he suddenly felt as if he might die:

> I felt as if lightning or a slower etherial flame had been penetrating and rolling through every atom of my body, which being past, I did not breathe so short as before, but found a sweet composure and ineffable calmness of spirit. I then walked about the room rejoicing and seemed to feel my body so light that I might choose whether to walk or fly. Such has been my unaccountable experience.[431]

Walsh's interpretation of his experience was undeniably holistic: bodily symptoms were inextricably linked to his spiritual condition. It is difficult to diagnose according to a

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[430] John Walsh to Charles Wesley, 11 August 1762, EMV 134.

[431] John Walsh to Charles Wesley, 11 August 1762, EMV 134. This account was written during the perfectionist controversy involving Maxfield and Bell, during which a contingent of Methodists claimed to have attained sinless perfection. To this end, Walsh adds: "Neither know I whether I have felt any sin or not, either spiritual or bodily, from that hour to this, only in dreams. But I think I have more than once, and would rather call myself the chief of sinners than a perfect Christian."

contemporary term such as “psychosomatic,” which necessarily implies a psychological disturbance that manifests itself physically. While such an evaluation may be interesting for twenty-first-century readers, it obscures the perspective of the practitioners and removes them from their cultural and historical context. For Walsh, the body and the soul were read together. He would not have, for example, spoken of weeping and trembling independently of sadness or ecstasy. When taken together, however, and coupled with biblical texts and other religious speech, they provided indicators of how God was working within his soul.

After the death of her brother, Mrs. Clagget found herself a victim of “the devil’s stratigems.” She began to doubt her brother’s salvation, which led to a “violent feaver on [her] spirits.” Clagget appears to have called a physician, who told her that her “distemper” was beyond the realm of his practice and medicines. He then asked about her state of mind, which she notes the minister neglected to do. For years, she continued to struggle with “the most horid illusions,” “many terrors,” and “blasphemous” and “gloomy suggestions from the powers of darkness.” Her fevers came and went, and she experienced extraordinary suffering while bearing her next six children, “remarkably more grevious than before.” During this period, she found it difficult to pray, though she tried to practice some “outward duties” and to attend preaching. After being awakened by George Whitefield, she was plunged into deep convictions. Her sins beset her with renewed strength, which she says greatly impaired her health. Her justification appears

to have taken place after spending an afternoon in prayer and singing with John Wesley. She wrote, "my surprising cure through prayer of faith came strongly into my mind."[432]

Like John Walsh, Mrs. Clagget did not distinguish between physical, mental and emotional health (at least, not on paper). She called upon both a minister and a physician to assist with her malady and, upon finding both options ineffective, simply continued in a general state of "impaired" health. As she employed medical terminology to describe her spiritual suffering, it is not surprising that she spoke of her long-awaited relief in terms of a "cure."

In 1762, William Grimshaw wrote to Mrs. Gallatin responding to her complaint of spiritual distress. He pastorally clarified that he did not believe her soul to be in danger, but expressed sympathy that she felt her life to be "tedious and miserable." He admonished (perhaps less pastorally), "Surely it is not the will of our gracious saviour that you shou'd always walk with your head bow'd down like a bull rush!" He then identified three potential causes of her malaise: a "silly whim" of her youth of which she had often complained; "looking too much at the corruptions of [her] heart"; and a "distracting agitation of mind between the various doctrines" and "unprofitable opinions" that she heard from preaching. When added to the usual workings of Satan, these three things could clog the "animal spirits as to cause a vaporous habit of body, tending to a religious melancholy, often times bordering upon despair." Grimshaw hoped that with a

[432] Mrs. Claggett to Charles Wesley, 24 July 1738, EMV 41.

combination of his future advice (he was hurried at the time) and God's help, her complaints would be replaced with songs of joy.[433]

Grimshaw's frank assessment of Mrs. Gallatin's condition is fascinating. While he did not believe that her soul was in peril, he did take seriously the effects of religious melancholy upon her health. Without condescension, Grimshaw pointed out "emotional" behaviors that led her into unnecessary despair—the very same types of behaviors that were evoked in the early narratives as signs of God's work within the soul (particularly the intensive self-examination). Whatever he identified in her condition that crossed the line into excess is not known, but he appeared confident in his diagnosis.

Historical context

It is helpful to view evangelical expression in the light of its cultural context, notably the so-called "culture of sensibility." This term is frequently used in relation to the eighteenth-century novel, which was strictly prohibited in evangelical circles. Despite the Methodists' condemnation of "frivolous" reading, the evangelical movement developed in parallel with its despised literary genre. What was forbidden under the guise of fiction became legitimated and even celebrated under religious repackaging. G. J. Barker-Benfield suggests that Methodism and sensibility "were two branches of the same culture."[434] Another scholar has even mused, "is not sentimentalism a secular mode of Methodism?"[435] In Methodism, as in novels, feelings and sentiment were expressed

[433] William Grimshaw to Mrs. Gallatin, 18 July 1762, DDPr 2/66, MARC.
[434] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 273.
[435] Melvyn New, review of Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability* in *The Scriblerian* 23 (1991), 249.

through bodily gestures, such as "tears, blushes, and sighs,"[436] as well as "involuntary palpitations and collapses." In this way, private feelings became public and visible manifestations open to observation and evaluation. To be seen as sensitive became a marker of refinement in higher social circles, and a measure of faith and receptivity in evangelical circles. While the body could be looked upon as an authentic communicator of inner feelings, it also ran the risk of being overtaken by those feelings. For this reason, sensibility had to be constantly renegotiated so as to avoid excess.[437] While the body necessarily overflowed from time to time, one had to draw the line somewhere.

As Paul Goring has observed in his study of eighteenth-century Methodism, "the body is a crucial site of contestation, and the degree to which it should be allowed to display passion for the purposes of persuasion becomes a point for debate in the formulation of polite behaviour."[438] This debate extends, of course, beyond the issues of persuasion and polite behavior. The expressive role of the body, as we have seen, was contested on both theological and medical grounds.

Early eighteenth-century medical practice found body and soul to "constitute a unity," though that unity was thought to be comprised of two "distinguishable entities that are in a constant state of exchange." The passions were believed to stimulate both body and soul, thus enabling existence to continue. Too much stimulation, however, disrupted the functioning of the body and could have dangerous effects.[439] In the course

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[436] Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 16, 201.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71.
[439] Bettina Hitzer, "Healing Emotions" in *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling 1700-2000*, ed. Ute Frevert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 121.

of the century, the language shifted from "passions" to "nerves," and physicians such as Cheyne began attributing religiously-related disorders to nerves rather than spiritual causes.[440]

Methodists were not always sure how to interpret loss of bodily control, or how to draw the line between a physical or mental malady and a "purely" spiritual struggle. While body and soul certainly appeared to affect one another, the root cause of any given dilemma was not always obvious, particularly in cases of demon-possession or other seemingly supernatural conflicts.[441] John Wesley's own opinion evolved over time. At first, he strove to retain the spiritual dimension as much as possible, attributing common "nervous lowness" to God's reproof.[442] He also warned that mental and physical weaknesses could open the door for Satan, who takes all opportunity to "stir up the heart against God."[443] Thus, spiritual malaise could lead to physical suffering, just as physical suffering could weaken the soul. While John wanted to defend physical manifestations as authentic signs of progress along the path toward salvation, he was forced to admit that certain cases belonged to the realm of psychiatric disorder. According to theologian Randy Maddox, John became more open to physical diagnoses over time and began advising individuals to be treated accordingly.[444] He even advised ministers to remain

[440] Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," *Methodist History* 46:1 (October 2007), 15-16.
[441] Rack, "Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing," 147.
[442] Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," 16.
[443] John Wesley, Sermon 84 "The Important Question" and Sermon 47 "Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations" in ed. Albert C. Outler, JWW, 3:191 and 2:222.
[444] Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," 12-13.

open to the physical element of mental and spiritual illness, while simultaneously advising physicians to take into account the spiritual nature of health.[445]

In addition to their efforts to make sense of symptoms, Methodists also had to negotiate supernatural claims of healing. If God was capable of healing the soul, it naturally followed that the body was fair game, as well. Methodists could even point to scriptural precedent as well as primitive Christianity in bolstering their rationale that healing could and would take place in the present (as opposed to only at the resurrection).[446] As Methodism accepted the possibility of miracles and extraordinary healing, it was obligated to evaluate on a case-by-case basis. Miracles deemed as authentic were published as exemplary models of God's gracious work in the world.[447] The line, however, had to be drawn somewhere. There were a number of cases throughout the century that caused Methodists to worry. One of the most troubling instances was the case of George Bell. In addition to his encouragement of sinless perfection, he also prophesied the end of the world and began claiming that he could heal the blind and mute. Eventually, he was expelled from the Methodists after attempting to raise the dead.[448]

The belief that God could work directly upon one's body and soul existed in tandem with other supernatural convictions, such as a belief in ghosts, witches, and divine manipulation of other natural phenomena such as the weather. What is most revealing about Methodism's supernatural tendency is not which claims were deemed

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[445] Ibid., 15.
[446] Rack, "Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing," 150 and Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," 7.
[447] See, for example, accounts of Bridget Barstock, Mary Maillard, etc.
[448] Rack, "Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing," 149-50.

authentic or not, but rather the process by which Methodists arrived at their conclusions. To take an extreme example, in 1762 Charles Wesley received an account of suspected witchcraft. Two young girls, Polly and Doppy, claimed to be controlled by a witch who whispered messages in their ears. At one point, Doppy was found naked under her bed. She explained that the witch had brought her there and had used her (the witch's) dirty hand to stop her mouth, preventing her from screaming. After a series of "agitations," the mistress of the house finally determined that the girls were telling a falsehood. The rationale was not simply that witches did not exist, but that the girls did not exhibit the genuine signs of having been handled by a witch: "But from first to last, there was no appearance of any preternatural distortion, strain or marvellous bodily motion or gesture, but all within their own power to act, neither were any marks impressed of bites, scratchings or dinches on any part of their body."[449]

Conversion and the body

Contentious and nebulous though it was, the connection between body and soul formed an essential component of early Methodist theology. Both body and soul were implicated in and affected by the conversion process.[450] The body became the map on which spiritual experience was manifested, read and interpreted.[451] In this way, tears and trembling were not merely potential side effects of conviction or justification—indeed for many, they served as outward proof of an inward change. Some early Methodists could

[449] M. Haynes to Charles Wesley, 1762, EMV 85.
[450] Melanie Dobson Hughes, "The Holistic Way: John Wesley's Practical Piety as a Resource for Integrated Healthcare," *Journal of Religion and Health* 47, no. 2 (June 2008), 245.
[451] Winckles, "Drawn Out in Love," 52.

not consider themselves properly converted until they had felt transformation in their flesh and bones. As Andrew Winckles observes in his study of early Methodist women:

> the women I discuss here do not think they truly have belief until their bodily senses are overwhelmed and they *feel* they have been transformed. This emphasis on the body as the location of experience thus introduces a lived aspect to their conversion accounts – it is *not* simply enough to give mental assent to the idea that Christ forgave their sins, they have to *experience* it and then *live* it in the way they engage in action in the world.[452]

As conduit for divine action, the body occasionally needed to lose control and to overflow its sensory capacity.[453]

Eyes and weeping

After reading scores of effusive conversion experiences, one imagines that not a few Methodists spent their early days in the movement in a state of constant dehydration. Early writers reported much weeping, "melting" and "overflowing" into tears. This occurred both during the period of convictions as well as during the raptures of one's "first love."

Margerit Austin recalled being "melted down in tears" at the sight of her unworthy self.[454] Historians often cite the effect of George Whitefield's preaching upon the colliers of Kingswood: "He could see the effect of his words by the white channels made by the tears which trickled down their blackened cheeks, for they came unwashed out of the coal pits to hear him... all affected and drenched in tears together."[455] In these cases, tears were a visible sign that a change was being effected. The bodily

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[452] Ibid., 41.
[453] Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 73-4.
[454] Margerit Austin to Charles Wesley, 19 May 1740, EMV 1.
[455] Pawlyn, *Bristol Methodism*, 14-15.

manifestation revealed that the evangelical message had begun to permeate the soul, as opposed to solely the intellect.

When considering his shortcomings, Nathanial Hurst wondered how God continued to put up with his carelessness. He lamented, "O, that my eyes were fountains of tears that I could weep day and night for offending such a saviour as Jesus is!"[456] Within the early narratives, tears of this sort demonstrated not a hopeless desperation, but rather a sign of progress. As long as the individual remained sensible or susceptible to feelings of remorse, she retained the possibility of being transformed. It was only when one found one's eyes completely dry that there was cause for concern. Note that Nathaniel Hurst did not report that his eyes *were* fountains of tears, but rather that he longed for them to be so. Indeed, early writers often chastised themselves for their cold, stony, immoveable hearts and minds—that is, their countenance before the dam of tears burst.

After having cried tears of remorse, the convert had yet another round to go. One also found oneself weeping uncontrollably upon being justified and receiving assurance of salvation. These frequently ecstatic experiences overwhelmed the convert with such love and joy that she could not prevent the tears. Elizabeth Halfpenny recounted an experience in which "the Word came with such power and demonstration that I was so filled with the love of God that it caused me to overflow with tears several times, which left a soreness at my heart which I never felt before."[457] The eyes seemd to provide a direct window into the soul, visibly and palpably manifesting that the heart could barely

[456] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15.
[457] Elizabeth Halfpenny to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 87.

contain the intense feelings generated by divine encounter. While the weeping that came with convictions demonstrated the individual's receptivity to God's initial work, tears of joy signified that God had accomplished the long-awaited transformation.

Eye behavior revealed a paradox within eighteenth-century values and etiquette. On the one hand, there was great emphasis placed upon controlling the eyes, so as not to be seen as rude, forward or "unthinking." "Staring and glancing of the Eyes," for instance, were considered in poor taste, and men in particular were encouraged to "control their senses and bring curiosity under the command of manly reason." This applied especially to those who gazed upon public spectacles, unable to check their insatiable appetite for the sensational.[458] Regulations concerning the eyes acknowledged simultaneously the power of those who saw and, alternately, the vulnerability or vulgarity of those who were seen. As was discussed in the previous chapter, early Methodists almost reveled in their exposure while recounting the numerous times the preacher's eye was fixed upon them. For them, the role of "the seen" was indispensable for acknowledging one's damned condition. During an ecstatic experience at the New Room, Susannah Designe was tempted to move to a more discreet location. God revealed to her, however, that it was a device of Satan. Bolstered by this knowledge, she affirmed, "if it is for thy Glory make me a Gazing stock to men & angels."[459] For Designe, God's purposes legitimated this improper situation of being stared at. George Whitefield emphasized the position of the "seen" by remarking aloud during his sermons

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[458] *The Gentleman's Library: Containing Rules for Conduct in All Parts of Life* (London: S. Birt and D. Browne, 1744), 337-38; Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 148-49; David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 89.
[459] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.

the responses that he observed: "Thus, I trust, some of you begin to feel; I see you concerned; I see you weeping; and, were I to ask some of you what you want to have done unto you, I know your answer would be 'that we may receive our sight.'"[460]

Though polite manners decreed that one must exercise control over the eyes, sentimental culture also required the occasional overflowing of those eyes in order to demonstrate one's sincerity and sensitivity. Scott Paul Gordon remarks that the eighteenth-century sentimental fiction aimed to promote disinterestedness not simply on an intellectual level, but by embodying it in the readers themselves. According to Gordon, "read 'em and weep" was essentially the goal of sentimental novels, as the reader's tears demonstrate the "legibility" of the spectacle. The physical manifestation authenticated compassion precisely because the gesture was believed to be involuntary.[461] While spontaneous tears may at times have authenticated speech, more often they transcended it, expressing what the tongue was incapable of mustering. Early Methodists often recounted their weeping in tandem with their speechlessness. John Mullan observes the literary parallel in the eighteenth-century novel *Pamela*, in which two characters are unable to express the depth of their feelings in words.[462] Instead, they rely on "the silent communication of moist eyes": "We could only look upon one another, with our eyes and our hearts full of a gratitude that would not permit either of us to speak."[463]

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[460] George Whitefield, "Blind Bartimaeus," in *The Sermons of George Whitefield* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 122.
[461] Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self*, 185, 204, 213.
[462] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (London, 1740).
[463] Quoted in John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 74.

While tearful eyes could be seen as authentic expressions of inner feelings, they could also be a source of confusion. Early Methodists were sometimes startled to learn that they could and ought to "feel" salvation, and so were doubly confused when the strong feelings actually arrived. Elizabeth Sais recalled hearing John Wesley preach at Clifton Church. She wrote that "the word came very sweet and with power," and that she "shed tears, but knew not well for what reason."[464] Susannah Designe also found herself shedding tears during a sermon, but she tried to restrain herself. She explained, "I Did not Remember I Had ever Seen any one cry in church and I was ashamed to be perticular." Designe's experience appears to have taken place in a Church of England congregation and not in a Methodist meeting. As such, it illustrates the novelty of "emotional" religious responses for at least some who were rooted in the established church.[465]

It may be at times tempting to consider tears a primarily feminine expression. Dennys DeBeret wrote to William Seward, "My wife weeps savourly over all your letters and did to singing your brother's hymn,"[466] neglecting to report on the state of his own eyes. Within Methodism, however, crying was at least equally the preserve of men. Thomas Middleton, for instance, recalled wishing to "weep my life away at the saviour's feet, to wash his feet with tears, and to kiss his feet." While approaching the communion table, he heard a particular hymn which "reached [his] very heart." At that moment, he

[464] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[465] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.
[466] Dennys DeBeret to William Seward, 24 April 1739, DDSe 39, MARC.

desired "no greater happyness than to mourn and weep continually."[467] Charles Wesley also recorded in his journals and letters many instances of himself crying, in addition to his exhortations for others to do so. In certain circles outside of Methodism, the tear became authorized as a proper, manly display of virtue and compassion. In his *Essay on the Action Proper for the Pulpit*, the Scottish Presbyterian pastor James Fordyce (ironically best-known for his *Sermons to Young Women*, 1766) put forth the notion of the "manly tear." According to Fordyce, the tear was a symbol of Christian virtue, and was therefore an appropriate and indeed a necessary component of masculine behavior.[468]

Evangelical function of tears

From the perspective of many Methodists (and non-Methodists) in the eighteenth century, tears functioned as an authentic expression of inner feelings. This should not obscure the performative aspect of weeping, whether or not the subjects were conscious of it themselves. For a few writers, there was a certain level of discomfort with tears, especially in contexts that were more staid and somber. Others were unashamed—they both cried in public *and* wrote openly of their experiences. In short, they became a religious spectacle, which then became part and parcel of their testimony and evangelism. In speaking and writing of their own tearful responses, they not only convinced their readers and hearers of the veracity of their experiences—they stirred the compassion of their audience, as well. If they were lucky, their own weeping would evoke a longing for conversion in others.

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[467] Thomas Middleton to Charles Wesley, 8 October 1743, EMV 111.
[468] James Fordyce, *An Essay on the Action Proper for the Pulpit* in *Theodorus: A Dialogue Concerning the Art of Preaching*, David Fordyce ed., (1755).

In Joseph Jones' account of the life of William Grimshaw, one sees clearly the persuasive power of tears. In order to settle a disagreement between two parties, Grimshaw pleaded, "I beg you upon my knees: I will put my head under your feet, if you will but love one another." He then "fell upon his knees, & broke out into prayers & tears, till all in the house were melted down into tears & perfectly reconciled."[469] No other convincing arguments or pathetic prayers have made their way into this account. Contagious weeping stands alone as the decisive factor in this accord.

As an outward sign of inner transformation, tears and other bodily manifestations fit precisely the definition of a sacrament. Phyllis Mack's observations about seventeenth-century visionary women holds true for many eighteenth-century Methodists: "Weeping thus had sacramental significance as a tangible sign of an inward repentant grace, so that the words of the visionary… were more efficacious for being uttered through tears."[470] A purely verbal assertion of a spiritual change without the accompanying emotive responses could be seen as suspect: dry eyes might indicate that God's work had not yet penetrated the heart.

Out-of-body experiences

If the tears and watery eyes of Methodism found a secular parallel in the literature of polite society, some of its other physical manifestations departed from the realm of acceptable behavior, entering the territory of the eccentric and even the sensational. Susannah Designe recounted an unusual incident that accompanied her conversion:

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[469] Joseph Jones' Account of William Grimshaw, 1763, EMV 9.
[470] Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 26.

> Then ye power of God & wrought so wonderfull upon me that my natural Sences Departed from me for a time & my Hands was drawn in a Surprizing manner ye Back parts there of almost touched my arms & when it was visible it was a Supernatural power. Ye Devil told me it was not ye power of God for he had that power over me but I sent him to my saviour for an answear & Lifting up my eyes I saw Jesus standing Smiling over me and heard a voice in my inmost Soul Saying I see ye travail of my Soul & am satisfied.[471]

What impressed Designe was not so much the startling hand contortion itself, but the fact that God irrefutably manifested his work through her body. In this single episode, she witnessed the supernatural power of God (taking away her senses), the triumph of Jesus over Satan, and the affirmation of her faith and salvation. According to her interpretation, the physical manifestation was only one sign of these important truths.

In a similar manner, Elizabeth Hinsom also had her senses taken away from her. While hearing a sermon of John Wesley, she began trembling from her strong convictions, so much so that her neighbors had to prop her up. She wrote simply, "And I was out of my senses, but the Lord a wakened me with, 'Peace be unto you. Your sins are for giveing you.'" She returned home in a joy that lasted into the following day. Hinsom did not attempt to analyze her supernatural experience. For her, it seemed self-evident that God worked "mytelly" in her, using the experience to assure her that her sins had been forgiven.[472]

Mrs. Plat recounted that while praying, she was deprived of her senses. During this time, she received such power in her heart that she thought it might be rent asunder. She received this power "for the space of 15 minuits," after which it was revealed to her that the Holy Ghost was upon her and that God's hand pierced into her heart. In that

[471] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.
[472] Elizabeth Hinsom to Charles Wesley, 25 May 1740, EMV 2.

moment, she felt a "sure pardon" of her sins. Jesus then snatched her soul from the grasp of the devil. In an intriguingly apt Freudian slip (one presumes), Mrs. Plat remarked, "It is heart work to be born again."[473] In all of these instances, the deprivation of one's senses was immediately or soon after followed by a strong sense of pardon and assurance. It was typically a rare occurrence, not to be repeated following one's conversion. The supernatural aspect was not troubling, nor was it especially revered in and of itself. The writers presented their experiences simply and in plain language, matter-of-factly stating the means by which God wrought lasting and holistic change in their lives.

While some writers declared with certainty that their physical senses were removed from them, others erred on the side of caution. Eliza Mann would not permit her soul to depart from the flesh entirely; instead, she preserved metaphorical language in recounting her experience. She wrote, "I find such strong hungerings and thirsting after perfect righteousness and longing after God that my soul *seems as tho* it would burst the bands of flesh and fly to him."[474] Mariah Price also hesitated to part with her faculties, however briefly. She struggled to know how to tell her story: "It was such a work so planly felt and so wonderfully wrought that I almost lose my senses to explane it and can not do it nither." She recalled crying out to Charles Wesley in the midst of a crowd that if she had ten thousand souls, she might give them all to God. Charles responded to the

[473] Mrs. Plat to Charles Wesley, 1740, EMV 10. The account of Naomi Thomas is similar: Following two experiences in which it seemed her very bones were "out of joint," she found her "senses and strength" taken away for a "small time." According to her interpretation, God demonstrated his power to a "rebellious wretch," afterward easing her burden and allowing her to return home in comfort and joy. Naomi Thomas to Charles Wesley, June 1742, EMV 129.
[474] Eliza Mann to Charles Wesley, January 1742, EMV 107 (emphasis mine).

tearful and trembling Price, asking her if she had found the peace that passed understanding. She replied, "Yes, indeed, I have, and it doth pass understanding."[475]

In this instance, lack of comprehension served to confirm God's perplexing means of bringing souls to salvation. In this way, both confusion and confidence witnessed to the mysteries of conversion. For example, Thomas Cooper spent three weeks in a state of intense joy. Echoing the sentiments of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, he claimed not to have known whether he was in or out of the body.[476] Nathaniel Hurst employed the same scripture text when writing his account, also retaining metaphorical language. When hearing John Wesley preach on the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11, he began trembling. He wrote, "for my bones shook *as if* they would part from my flesh." God then granted him peace in his soul, which lasted for several months. One day, while he was working, he was suddenly overcome with God's love: "I knew not wether I was in the body or out of the body." After going to prayer, he felt his heart "much enlarged," and found his soul "calm and full of peace."[477]

It is worth noting that in these two accounts, the (nearly) out-of-body experience did not take place within a Methodist meeting or preaching event. God's love overcame Hurst while he was going about his daily work. While Cooper did have some experiences during group events, his joys were rekindled while he was alone, and the instance recounted above took place in his home. Though certain scholars such as John Birrell have argued that ecstatic experiences were confined to crowded spaces and other

[475] Mariah Price to Charles Wesley, 18 May 1740, EMV 12.
[476] Thomas Cooper to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 16.
[477] Nathaniel Hurst to Charles Wesley, 1741, EMV 15 (emphasis mine).

suggestive environments, not a few Methodists had powerful spiritual encounters while sitting alone at home, or while engaged in seemingly mundane tasks.[478]

Several spiritual narratives recounted sensations so strong that the body itself was pushed to its very limit. While hearing Charles Wesley pray, Elizabeth Hinsom found "uncommon power" in her soul. She recalled, "[I] could hardly containe my self. I was so fild I could hardly work." On another occasion, she again found God's power filling her soul:

> I could not containe my self. I was so fild I would not bear my self, for I was forst to cry to the Lord to inlarge my heart or I could not have bore it. My flesh feald and had not the Lord inlarge[d] my heart, it must have broke.[479]

Though the change was being wrought within the heart, the growing pains were so strong that the flesh failed (or nearly failed) when confronted with such strong feelings. Rebecah Wrench described an overwhelming communion experience thus:

> But o when I received the bread into my mouth, how I was overflowed with his heavenly presence! My head, my heart, my soull, my every vein, my eyes overflowing with tears of love and joy unspeakable which cannot be uttered (as it is now at the writing of it).[480]

The account of Elizabeth Downes employed some of the most intensely physical language in the Early Methodist Volumes. She recounted numerous occasions in which she experienced great pain, fluttering and sinking. All the while, however, she took great care to specify that it was her heart that was being affected. Her language consistently applied physical symptoms to the transformation of her heart, using the phrase "as it were" to distinguish between metaphor and hallucination. For example:

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[478] Birrell, *John Wesley*, 125, 136.
[479] Elizabeth Hinsom to Charles Wesley, 25 May 1740, EMV 2.
[480] Rebecah Wrench to Charles Wesley, 8 May 1741, EMV 140.

> after the sacrament was ended Mr. Diaper gave out the hymn, and att mentioning the cross perticular, I felt *as itt were* a change *as I thought* inward and outward. My heart fluttered *as though* itt would have tore out of my body. *I seemed as though* I had been convulsed... I was immediately caught *as itt were* out of the body. [emphasis mine]

After returning home from a band meeting, she sat down to think for a moment about what God was preparing to do in her soul. Suddenly, she felt her heart (yet again) overwhelmed:

> I cannot describe what itt was like particular, but *itt was as* an odour that perfumes. *I felt that* every sinew and joynt was effected. Itt ran through the very marrow of my bones and sink me *as itt were* nothing that I was ready to cry out several times in a day, "Lord, I cannot contain itt." Att last, I felt the overflowing of the love of God so in my heart that nature began to sink, and I said to Sister Nichols, "I believe I shall be forced to take to my bed." She said, "The Lord will inlarge your capacity, he knows you are but an earthen vessel." I often felt such shootings within that my soul *would seem to be* all of a quiver ready for the wing to soar to Christ.

Despite her meticulous use of metaphorical language, it is clear that Downes experienced physical symptoms as she considered taking to her bed.

Coming to life

What, then, was the result of this transformational process? How did Methodists interpret life in the afterglow of conversion? Many Methodists, both leaders and laity alike, spoke of salvation in terms of healing and restoration. As Melanie Dobson Hughes observes, "God's justifying and sanctifying grace intervenes in our earthly lives to bring healing of our sin-diseased souls."[481] Within the conversion process, the individual was made aware of her illness, led to *feel* that illness and need of healing, and finally brought to a state of health and wholeness. Early writers like Thomas Middleton frequently noted

[481] Hughes, "The Holistic Way," 246.

the tonic effects of particular spiritual experiences: "Came to the Foundery in the morning, and the hymns and preaching seemed to be directed immediately to me. They was to my soul as healing medicens."[482]

The transformation effected by conversion, however, was more than a mere augmentation of health. It was nothing less than a total rebirth. In order to be born again, however, one first needed to die to sin and worldly cares. Hannah Hancock, among others, wrote of "dying daily to the world." After considerable worry about her practice of prayer, she was struck with an undefined sickness in which she suffered temptations and the fear of death. She did not record that she was actually in danger of dying, only that God removed the fear from her, filled her with love, and fed her soul.[483] Elizabeth Sais went one step further, speaking of both body and soul together. She described her convicted state thus:

> The poor and needy sought water, but there was none, and her tongue failed for thirst. I was so feeble that I could scarce speak, my sorrows compassed me about on every side. I thought I should never anymore have the oil of joy for the spirit of heaviness, I had no left in my bones by reason of absence of my God. My very body was ready for the grave, the spirit had well nigh failed before him, and the soul which he had made.

While hearing John Wesley preach, she experienced "the power of God… in an extraordinary manner." Sais recalled, "I was as a dead man out of mind… I found that my saviour was a physician that healed both soul and body."

For others, death was symbolized by the failure of the body. In addition to the previously-mentioned out-of-body experience, some people simply fell to the floor. It is

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[482] Thomas Middleton to Charles Wesley, 8 October 1743, EMV 111.
[483] Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley, April 1742, EMV 86.

interesting that Methodists hardly ever described this in polite terms of "fainting": rather, they almost always referred to it as "dropping down *as if dead*."[484] Charles Wesley recorded numerous instances in which people dropped to the ground during his sermons. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, he frequently compared the unconverted individual to a dead body, emphasizing the need to be spiritually reborn. The gesture of falling served as a physical embodiment of this "death" that precipitated rebirth.

As noted in the previous chapter, this passage into rebirth coincided with the activation of one's spiritual sense. "Instead of depending upon the physical senses to alert them to things that appear or sound good, with their spiritual senses [the converts] are able to discern what has lasting, eternal value."[485] In this way, the failure and transcendence of the physical faculties was essential for stimulating the spiritual sense. John Wesley used the illustration of a baby whose use of senses are somewhat limited while inside the womb. After birth, however, the senses begin to operate fully in their new environment.[486] Such it was with someone who was spiritually reborn. Mary Ramsay identified with this experience in her written account:

> In February last, I was medetating on what I had heard, and saw I wanted the remission of my sins. And the Lord spoke unto me, saying, "I am nigh that justifyeth. Thou art justified. Believe, and thou shalt be saved." Then I said,

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[484] See, for example, "A Short Account of the Experience of Sister Mecham," EMV 110: While viewing a shame siege at White Chapple Mount, "she cried aloud, 'There is not among all these such a wretch as I!' and fell down as dead. Also at hearing a sermon of the Rev. Mr. Whestly on the sin against the Holy Ghost, she also fell down as dead."

[485] Laura Bartels Felleman, "A Necessary Relationship: John Wesley and the Body-Soul Connection," in *"Inward and Outward Health": John Wesley's Holistic Concept of Medical Science, the Environment and Holy Living*, ed. Deborah Madden (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 160.

[486] Ibid., 159.

> "Lord, I will believe." And then I found myself quite unother. I was as I thought passed from death unto life. I thought I was in unother world.[487]

This passage into new life "requires an inner awareness of God's grace: the devotee 'feels, is inwardly sensible of, the graces which the Spirit of God works in his heart.'"[488] In order for this to take place, body and soul had to begin to work in tandem. Accordingly, God came closer. The divine inhabited the body, simultaneously filling the heart. This incarnational encounter was sometimes violent, as the corrupt flesh could not always bear the nearness of divine presence. In his examination of the relationship between feelings and sensory perception in the eighteenth-century, Benno Gammerl remarks that "spatial proximity was… of decisive importance for feeling": "'the thing that one wished to feel' had to be set at a 'proper distance.'… Feeling required closeness."[489] Whereas sight required a certain distance from the object of perception, feeling demanded proximity. Early Methodist theology ranked feeling above intellectual comprehension, promoting feeling as the most effective and authentic way of knowing.

Feelings

Early Methodism relied upon feelings (both physical sensations and emotions) not to the exclusion of reason and knowledge, but as a genuine means of knowing. According to the Methodist, "feelings… are our most reliable means of cognition."[490] One would not say, "I knew myself to be justified, and as a result I felt." Instead, one might declare, "I felt x, y and z, and from that time I knew I was justified." Different

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[487] Mary Ramsay to Charles Wesley, 4 June 1740, EMV 13.
[488] John Wesley, Sermon 45, "The New Birth," in ed. Albert C. Outler, JWW, 2:188.
[489] Benno Gammerl, "Felt Distances" in *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling 1700-2000*, ed. Ute Frevert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 179.
[490] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 34.

stages of the conversion process were to be accompanied by their proper feelings: the pain of guilt and remorse during convictions, the distress and anxiety of battling sins within and without, the overwhelming joy of new birth, and the healthy confidence of spiritual maturity. As part of their pastoral duty, Methodist leaders tried to encourage the appropriate feelings at the appropriate time. After already having been justified, Elizabeth Sais had a moving experience during the sacrament. She recalled, "I felt the power of God in such a manner that I was as one that had little strength left." Her minister, however, interpreted her body language to mean that she was in "heaviness." He subsequently told her that "it was a place for rejoicing and not for mourning."[491] According to John Wesley, the "normal" state of a sanctified Christian was characterized by a profound happiness. This did not refer to the ecstasy of the newly-converted, but rather to a deep joy that motivated holy living.[492] This was a holistic happiness, a state of health in which "appetites and passion [acted] in according with the will, and the will [acted] in conjunction with what the mind understood to be the truth."[493]

The problem with feelings, of course, was that they sometimes stubbornly refuse to be generated at the right place and time. Phyllis Mack observes that "Methodists were often overwhelmed by both the importance of emotional honesty and the sense that truth receded the more, the more fervently they pursued it."[494] While this loss of control was theologically important for demonstrating the divine origins of spiritual experiences, it

[491] Elizabeth Sais to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 126.
[492] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 35.
[493] Chris Lohrstorfer, "Know Your Disease, Know Your Cure: A Critical Analysis of John Wesley's Sources for his Doctrine of Original Sin," (Ph.D. diss, University of Manchester, 2006), 80.
[494] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 18.

was also a source of great frustration before these experiences actually occurred. Elizabeth Sais confessed feeling left out when others around her were convulsing:

> I went constantly to the societies, and at one time when the people were taken with violent fits of conviction, some of whom being in a few minuits set at liberty and sang praise to the Lord, and I also sympathized with them, and thought that I also must have been partaker of their condition before I could be a Christian, and wished to undergo the same convictions.

For the historian, the difficulty of evaluating such spiritual experiences lies in both terminology and the tendency to diagnose according to current conceptions of how the body, mind and soul are linked.[495] In his text *Watching and Praying: Personality Transformation in Eighteenth Century British Methodism*, Keith Haartman provides a fascinating study of the psychology of spiritual transformation. Using psychoanalysis, Haartman interprets conversion in terms of childhood trauma, depression and transference. He especially emphasizes the importance of transference relationships in "exacerbat[ing] and facilitat[ing] the neurosis towards a therapeutic end."[496] While the study succeeds in its own milieu, offering a convincing analysis from a modern perspective, it is not a sufficient interpretation from a historical point of view, as the psyche is examined in isolation from the body. As Benno Gammerl cautions, "from today's perspective, feeling as touch does not belong to the canon of emotion concepts, properly speaking."[497] The link between physical symptoms and emotional states are

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[495] I align myself with the position of Michael MacDonald in his study of early modern psychology: "Since my purpose is to discuss changes in the governing elite's beliefs about mental disorder, it would be inappropriate to adopt present-day definitions of psychiatric illnesses and project them backwards into the past. Nor would it be appropriate to describe those beliefs in a specialized terminology unlike the words laymen use now." Michael MacDonald, "Insanity and the Realities of History in Early Modern England" in *Psychological Medicine* 11, no. 1 (1981), 11-25.
[496] Haartman, *Watching and Praying*, 46.
[497] Benno Gammerl, "Felt Distances," 179.

generally subsumed under the heading "psychosomatic," which reduces the physical manifestation to a negative side effect of psychological distress. Even the word "emotion" is somewhat misleading, as it circumvents the physical aspect of "feeling." It is clear that for early Methodists, the physicality of their experiences and language pointed to the body as a site where divine redemptive activity took place. The flesh was not merely disparaged as sinful, but rather viewed as a legitimate signifier of one's salvific state. Its value came from the divine workings within and through it, and the degree to which it worked in tandem with the spirit. By itself, however, the body was corrupt, fragile and unreliable. The frailty of the flesh, vexing though it might be, provided the stage for God's restorative and regenerative powers.

Closing reflections

It will be observed that the vast majority of early writers were not "habitual visionaries."[498] The most potent spiritual experiences appear to be directly linked with particular phases of the conversion process rather than regular occurrences throughout one's life. Though some recount at certain times that they wished their intense joys might last forever, they were quickly disillusioned by renewed onsets of temptation, or the simple fact that such heightened states of feeling cannot be sustained. Susannah Designe wrote of a rapturous experience while receiving communion, reflecting to herself, "but here was my Danger—I thought I should be always so as this & that I Should not see war any more."[499]

[498] Henry Rack, "Early Methodist Experience," 10.
[499] Susannah Designe's Experience, 8 April 1742, DDCW 9/2.

Not a few writers demonstrated an acute awareness of how their behaviors might be perceived by the rest of society. They understood very well the risks that being Methodist entailed (loss of job security, being disowned by family, susceptibility to violence, etc.), and they were for the most part under no impressions that ecstatic experiences ought to be a normative state. Joseph Carter recalled his own justification: "I burst out a crying, & laughing, & dancing, & jumping about the room, that any one, if they had seen me, would have thought me craze."[500] Indeed, it was the extraordinary nature of such experiences that lent them credibility. As the results of John Bennet's poll "Reasons alledged by saveral persons for their leaving the society's" reveal, only one feared "falling into fitts."[501] Nine claimed to have left because of ridicule. The vast majority, however, took their leave for more practical reasons, such as not being given sacrament at church, and not having the consent of their masters or mistresses.

According to certain scholars, instantaneous conversions and physical manifestations were largely the byproduct of mob mentality and the hysteria generated by crowded spaces and other suggestive environments.[502] Individual spiritual accounts tell a different story, as many writers recount experiences that occurred in solitude or with two or three others nearby, as well as profound experiences occurring in the midst of daily life at home and at work. In many instances, an experience was precipitated during a preaching event or group meeting, only to be brought to fruition in a more intimate

[500] Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 17.
[501] John Bennet Letter Book, 42.
[502] See, for example, Birrell, *John Wesley*, 125, 136.

environment later on. Such patterns demonstrate the importance of what Keith Haartman terms "unconscious incubation."

The early narratives also demonstrate a range of literate and intellectual abilities. While the stories of illiterate converts have naturally left no written evidence, there are a number of early writers whose spiritual account was probably one of the only written endeavors of their adult life. Others appeared to be comfortable with the pen, and exhibited a facility for written communication. This diversity defies the stereotypes put forth by scholars such as Birrell, who claim that demonstrative conversions occurred only among the ignorant, "among people in whom the inhibitory action of a well-disciplined mind is not present, and whose ordinary mental activities are of limited range; [and] above all, among people with little faculty for expression."[503] Furthermore, a high literacy level does not guarantee a compelling spiritual account. Some of the most remarkable narratives come from the pens of those who might have preferred not to write in the first place. Oftentimes, what renders an account convincing is the process by which early writers tried to make sense of their experiences. Writers of all abilities and social status alike struggled to determine the origins of their feelings, and as several scholars have observed, such introspective analyses was highly rational and developed as part of and not in response to modernity.[504] Abraham Jones recalled watching more experienced Christians "crying out under strong temptation" and judging his own state to be far worse in comparison because he "experience[ed] no such desertions." In the end,

[503] Ibid., 123, 126.
[504] See, for example, Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 18.

he determined that God's "workings are not the same in all souls." He trusted that God would continue to work in him as he saw fit.[505]

The timeframe of this dissertation covers what seems to be the high point of ecstatic activity in early Methodism, from the Bristol revivals of the early 1740s to the so-called "perfectionist outbreak" of the 1760s.[506] Nevertheless, demonstrative religious behavior continued to manifest itself among Methodists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as among some of its descendants such as the holiness and Pentecostal movements. In 1776, John Crook wrote to John Wesley notifying him of God's unprecedented work in the Isle of Mann:

> I've seen in our meetings 7 or 8 thrown down as it were by violence, not in a state of bondage unto fear, but with the overwhelming spirit of adoption, enabling them with joy unspeakable and full of glory to cry, "Abba Father," having "felt [the promise] apply'd, they joyfully cry'd, me, me, he hath lov'd and for me he hath dy'd." So that many of the brethren and sisters, particularly in Peeltown, Ballaugh, Seelby and Barcile could say be blessed experience, "Jesus all the day long, is my joy and my song." And when they heard or thought of those words, especially in their meetings, "He hath lov'd me I cry'd, he hath suffer'd and dy'd, to redeem such a rebel as me."
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> They had not power to contain themselves, but cry'd out, "O, sweet Jesus, O help me to praise Jesus." And generally speaking, they were so fill'd with extasie that many of them lay prone, and if they were help'd up, they could no more stand than an ifant so that in this respect, those words, "They shall return to the days of their youth" were litterally fulfilled in them. Their bodies were to a man, thro[wn] into such a tumult that sweat seem'd to usher or exsude out of every pore in vast quantities, but indeed description fails, so I'll not attempt it any farth[er] but may add that we have had young men and maidens, old men and children (even as young as 14 years) praising the most excellent name of God and of h[is] CHRIST.[507]

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[505] Abraham Jones to John Wesley, 12 December 1742, Letters to John Wesley box 1, MARC.
[506] I find it intriguing that the demonstrative events involving George Bell in the 1760s are consistently referred to in terms of disease.
[507] John Crook to John Wesley, 24 July 1776, Letters to John Wesley box 1, MARC.

Evidently of a different mind, Mary Lee wrote to Charles Wesley in 1785, complaining that the people in Manchester "are not so sociable as in Bristol." She continued, "I never saw so much screaming as the vulger have at prayer meetings. You would think they are in a passion at God, or that he was like the God of Baal deaf. The preachers have spoke to them, so I hope they will take caution. The more rational part are not pleased with such confusion."[508] It appears that opinions concerning effusive performances continued to form a "complex compound of disgust and desire."[509]

At the risk of overstepping my chronological and geographical limits, I will venture to suggest that certain descendants of Methodism retained the emphasis on physical manifestations without the accompanying introspective processes. In his study of nineteenth-century camp meetings in the United States, Troy Messenger observes the same kind of preaching that encourages "a particular kind of interaction to occur between the individual and the divine." Regarding physical manifestations, however, he notes that they "often *preceded* conscious efforts on the part of the individual to seek the divine. In other words, the body manifested the first signs of an irresistible grace."[510] This is a subtle but significant shift from the symbiotic relationship between body and soul exhibited in early Methodist theology, which still insisted that whatever happened in the body was an overflowing of the activity in the heart. In this way, physical manifestations almost always followed a sincere desire to be transformed. Nonetheless, there are exceptions to every rule, and certainly not all Methodists interpreted their experiences in

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[508] Mary Lee to Charles Wesley, 7 November 1785, EMV 100.
[509] Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 62.
[510] Troy Messenger, *Holy Leisure: Recreation and Religion in God's Square Mile* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 65.

the same way. As we have seen, the question of the necessity of physical manifestations raised serious issues concerning the ordinary and extraordinary workings of the divine, and the interaction between body and soul.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DRAMA OF DYING

"[They] were rather more chearfull then one would have wished them to have been."[511]

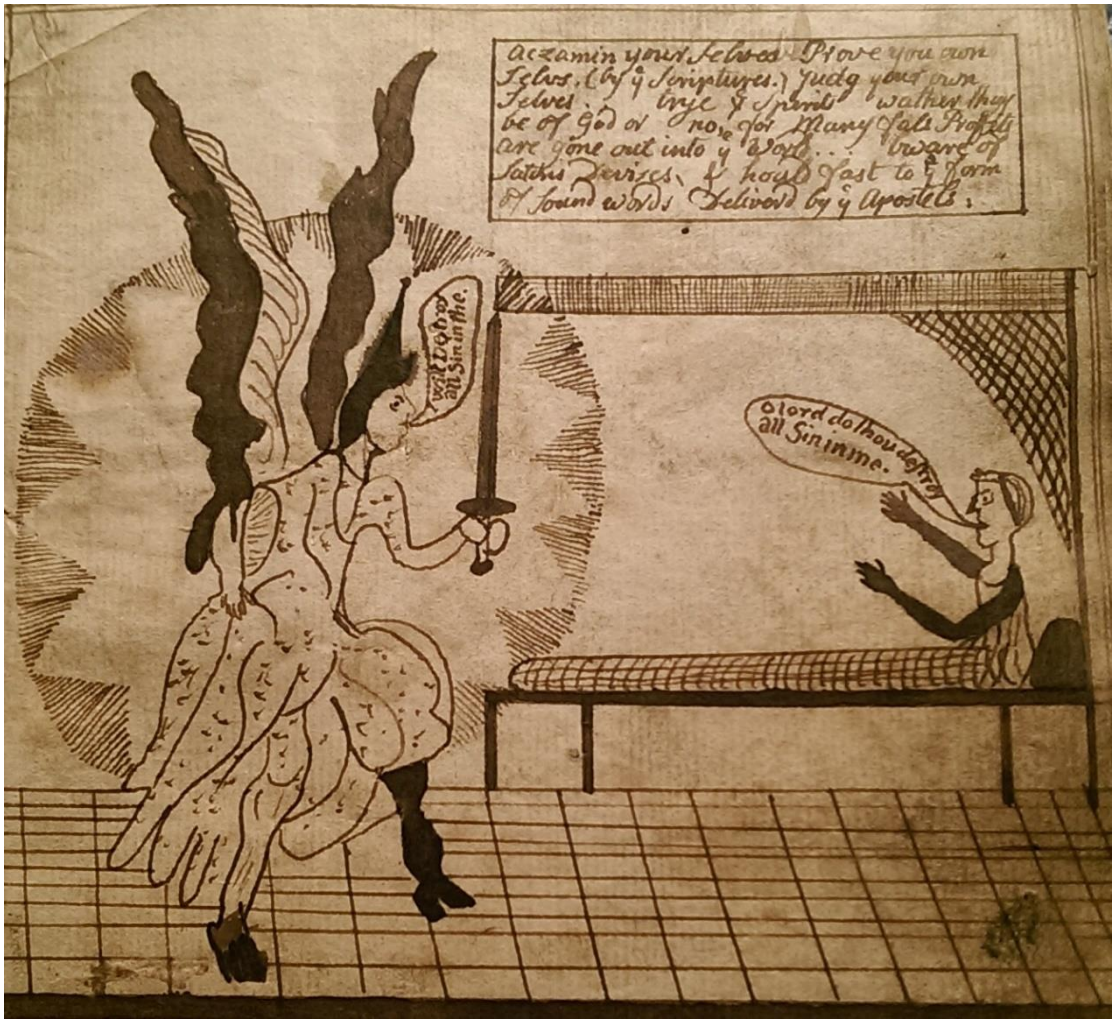

Figure 5. Vision of an angel promising eradication of sin
"Aczamin your Selves Prove you own Selvs, (by ye Scriptures.) Judg your own Selves. Trye ye Sperits wather they be of God or no, for Many fals Profets are gone out into ye World… bware of Satan's devises, & hould fast to ye form of Sound words Deliverd by ye Apostels."

[511] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 1771, EMV 141.

Supernatural being: “I will Destroy all Sin in the.”

Woman in bed: “O lord do thou destroy all Sin in me.”

Introduction

The first four chapters have dealt with spiritual experiences as related in the conversion accounts of early Methodists. These narratives often begin by recounting one’s childhood or youth, covering notable events and observations through the time of writing in adulthood. This last chapter turns its attention to accounts which capture the final phase of the lifespan, the deathbed narratives.

The primary distinction between the conversion and deathbed narratives (apart from the occasion, of course) is that the deathbed account is necessarily non-autobiographical. It is not “an event which can be assessed from the reminiscences—and subsequent conduct—of those who have experienced it.”[512] Consequently, these narratives provide not only observations of the dying individual, but also glimpses into the concerns of the author, as well as of other participants in the drama surrounding the deathbed. These narratives typically recount the final illness and last moments of the individual. Authors took care to include last words, any hymns sung, advice from the dying person, responses to and interpretations of physical pain, and questions posed by friends and family and the responses thereto. The overall goal was to demonstrate that the person was fully convinced of his or her salvation, as well as to inspire others to holy living and a similarly blessed death when their time approached.

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[512] John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 1.

The degree of detail may at times startle modern ears. As with the conversion narratives, "bouts of doubt and temptation were not concealed," but rather included as a platform for spiritual triumph.[513] In addition to spiritual and psychological suffering, physical symptoms were also meticulously recorded—everything from breathing problems and hiccups to severe vomiting and "scorbutick sores and ulcers."[514] This may seem a bit excessive until one remembers that the fear of death and dying played a significant role in the spiritual development of early Methodists. The question "Are you afraid to die?" forms a haunting refrain throughout the conversion process, as the devotee struggles to attain assurance of salvation—assurance that all will be well on the other side. The same questions return in the moments leading up to death. Faced with the reality of impending death and the potential suffering which accompanied it, it was theoretically possible for the believer (according to Arminian theology) to lose one's salvation at the last moment. This led deathbed observers to pose "special probings and questionings" in order to assure themselves of the dying person's eternal fate.[515]

Conversely, an unconverted person might be saved at the last moment. Though Joseph Humphreys admonished a correspondent, "Let us do nothing towards each other which may occasion repentance upon a death-bed," repentance at the last moment was certainly preferable to no repentance at all.[516] For this reason, Methodist leaders gave special attention to prisoners awaiting execution, exhorting them to repent of their ways and to accept the salvation that Christ offered, even and especially to the likes of

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[513] Henry D. Rack, "Evangelical Endings: Deathbeds in Evangelical Biography," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 42.
[514] Joseph Dornford to Charles Wesley, 23 June 1763, EMV 135.
[515] Rack, "Evangelical Endings," 47.
[516] Joseph Humphreys to Charles Wesley, 3 December 1741, EMV 89.

convicted criminals such as them. In addition to traditional deathbed narratives, this chapter will also examine sources concerning these "condemned malefactors." Both the ministry itself and public critique of it reveal something about eighteenth-century attitudes toward the spectacle of death.

As with the conversion narratives, the best-known sources of deathbed narratives come from the *Arminian Magazine*, John Wesley's greatest legacy of spiritual literacy. The specified timeframe purposely prohibits these later publications from being used in this study; therefore, the majority of research is based on earlier narratives written largely (but not exclusively) for Charles Wesley. These early sources are typically less standardized and less stylized than those that had been selected and edited for formal publication. Though patterns are certainly evident, these unpublished accounts retain a flavor of authenticity and spontaneity. In some cases, they demonstrate aspects that would have certainly been deemed objectionable or undesirable in the *Arminian Magazine*. This diversity of material permits an examination of not only elements of the "good death," but also those contributing to undesirable deaths. Material concerning condemned malefactors is taken primarily from the journals and letters of Methodist leaders who were permitted access to the prisons.

Around the deathbed

While the early modern deathbed has been described as a "social place" where "neighbours gathered to swap stories or to settle quarrels," the Georgian deathbed had

become a more private space.[517] Attendance seems to have been limited to family and close acquaintances, in addition to the doctor and minister. When possible, a close friend or relative was designated to write the deathbed narrative, though Methodist leaders sometimes created or compiled accounts themselves in order to inform Charles or John Wesley. Still, the ideal candidate for the job was whoever knew the deceased the best and had spoken to them the most. In her account of Sister Rogers's death, Mary Francis explained that she was chosen because "the most that Sister Rogers spok she spok to me."[518]

Deathbed narratives generally recounted one's final illness and manner of death, though it was also common to include one's conversion account as part of the narrative. Such was the case for Mary Midgley, whose life and death were dictated by Sister Ryder to Francis Gilbert, who then transmitted the account to Charles Wesley. Gilbert reported that he verified the authenticity of the account by speaking to other acquaintances. Such accounts tended to reveal the priorities and concerns of the acquaintances, who selected episodes that they felt were particularly significant for understanding the character of the deceased. While some flattering surely took place, the accounts also revealed personal struggles, including objectionable habits and personal vices. In this instance, Gilbert mentioned Mary Midgley's "trifling" ways prior to conversion, as he seems to have known her when she first moved to Sheffield. The account then proceeded to highlight Midgley's patience and compassion toward a violent husband, who,

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[517] See Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8 and Roy Porter, "Death and the Doctors in Georgian England" in *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 86.

[518] Mary Francis to Charles Wesley, 28 June 1745, EMV 61.

> often coming home drunk, would draw her out of the bed in winter when his cloaths have been wet, would beat and threaten to kill her, and then say "Where is now thy God?" But she would reply, "Blessed be God, I can turn the other cheek also," and with much sweetness would embrace him and say, "Billy, I love you." Yet this would not quiet him, for he would say, "Thou art a civil devil," and then would try various ways to ruffle her though to no purpose.

Shortly before she died, when she was suffering from great pain, her husband again came home drunk and "threatened to stick a knife into her and kicked her." Despite this, she remained undisturbed. Though her physical pain would not permit her to show outward signs of the customary rejoicing, she stated that she was joyful on the inside. During a visit a few days before her death, Gilbert found it difficult to understand her speech. In an effort to provide a few inspiring last words, he added that he *thought* she told him that "she was willing to die for the Lord had purified her."[519]

In a similar manner, the account of Sister Mecham did not attempt to disguise her overly "tender conscience," her serious and sensitive nature ("she was scarce ever seen to smile till twelve years old"), or her suicidal tendencies. It also emphasized her other sufferings in life: the death of her husband, being abandoned by her in-laws due to her association with the Methodists, and her many severe illnesses (which did not prevent her from "dragg[ing] her frail body" to hear Methodist preaching). In the end, she was described as "a faithfull and loving wife and mother, a kind friend and neighbour, a good mistress and a compassionate Christian."[520]

Within those narratives that exemplify the "good death," dying individuals were acutely aware and accepting of the fact that they were dying. At times, they seemed more

[519] Francis Gilbert to Charles Wesley, 7 November 1762, DDPr 1/32, MARC.
[520] The Experience of Sister Mecham, 1765, EMV 110.

at peace with the idea than their friends and relatives around them. When Henry Jackson lay ill, his daughter asked what food he would prefer. Sensing the end was near, or perhaps as a means of hastening the end, he replied, "Betty, I am to eat no more."[521] This scene also referenced the Last Supper, in which Jesus tells his disciples he will neither eat nor drink again until the fulfillment of God's kingdom (Luke 22:15-18, Matthew 26:26-29). In the event that a proper deathbed scene was not possible, as in a sudden death, pains were taken to demonstrate that the individual was already adequately prepared to die. In the case of Sister Bracy, she had been "warned" during a rheumatic episode that she had not long to live. Despite repeatedly notifying her family of her impending departure, she was not believed. Two years later, she suddenly became ill while on the way to retrieve her child from school. Upon being asked if she was able to speak, she cried out, "My God, my God, I come" and died immediately.[522] Though the manner of her death deprived her of the occasion to exercise the special prescience that dying people often enjoyed, the narrative suggests that she received it in advance.

Negotiating pain

For the early Methodists, as for many others, experiences of physical pain posed a spiritual challenge. In the ideal situation, pain provided the occasion for suffering persons to manifest their unwavering faith, relying on the love of Jesus to help them

[521] John Jones transcript of Henry Jackson's death, 23 February 1766, DDPr 2/28, MARC.
[522] Sister Bracy's death, 16 August 1753, EMV 28.

endure.[523] Upon learning that Ann Battell had smallpox, John Okely wrote to William Seward of his hopes for her:

> May God sanctify her affliction to her, that it may be a means of bringing her nearer to him, that she may dye to the world, and be more alive in Christ Jesus, and in his own due time may give her a happy issue out of it, and prepare us all for the like adversity with all those due qualifications of faith and repentance, patience and resignation.[524]

The weakening of the body, however, naturally opened the door to doubts, fears and desperation, and not everyone was equally equipped to cope. For this reason, family and friends posed certain questions to confirm that the dying person was properly assured of his or her faith. The pain, however, sometimes made it difficult (both physically and emotionally) for the individual to respond as one might have hoped.

Though Mary Francis did her best to portray Sister Rogers's patient resignation, she could not hide the fact that Rogers struggled greatly to comport herself according to Methodist standards. Francis recalled a "lettel season" when Rogers was so discouraged by her illness that she could not bear to hear preaching. Despite her many confident words spoken while in the "gratest extremity of pane," Rogers was aware of her limitations, as well as the role she was expected to play upon her deathbed. She exhorted her spectators not to doubt of her condition if she found herself unable to speak much before dying. As Rogers lay "a dieing," Francis asked her if she had "a full ashurance of her happeness." Rogers responded that she had, but that she had not the strength to speak. Similarly, Joanna Barber was visited with "exceding greatt pain of body" before

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[523] Richard J. Bell, "'Our People Die Well': Deathbed Scenes in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*," *Mortality* 10, no. 3 (August 2005), 217.
[524] John Okley to William Seward, 23 November 1738, DDSe 3, MARC.

her death, often praying that Jesus might "come quickly." When questioned about the state of her soul, she responded appropriately, affirming that "she knew that Christ had taken away all her sins." She then specified that she did not find much joy, though she did experience a "sweet calmness and serenity of mind."[525]

Such times of trial also provided the devil with an excellent opportunity of tempting dying persons. Brother Lambertson's unnamed daughter experienced "great conflict" with the devil while seized with cold sweats just before death. Struggling in both body and spirit, she cried out, "O, 'tis a sad thing to have a weary body! & a weary soul! O! It is hard to bear, O it is hard to bear." Elsewhere, she praised God for her pains, declaring that they were "spurs to press [her] forward." At the same time, she gave thanks that her pain was not too much to handle. Accepting the usefulness of suffering, she questioned her "tender hearted mother" who desperately sought a cure, "Why should we fly so much to doctors when we have so good a God to go to, too?" She appeared not to deny the healing capacity of physicians, but affirmed that spiritual healing was just as, if not more, important than medicine.[526]

Richard J. Bell notes of the accounts in the *Arminian Magazine* that the authors "seemed to take some small pleasure in describing the inefficacy and inadequacy of medical attempts to prolong life in the face of God's decision to draw it to a worthy close."[527] This is somewhat true of the earlier accounts, as well, though authors generally seemed open to the possibility that God could heal through the skill of the physician if he

[525] Joanna Barber's death, February 1752, EMV 22.
[526] Brother Lambertson to Charles Wesley, 1755, EMV 99.
[527] Bell, "'Our People Die Well,'" 219.

so chose. Such was the case with John Johnson, who told his physicians that he "look'd to God for a cure through their medicens." Though Johnson did not actually die of his illness (he writes the account himself), his life was for a time "dispar'd of." Upon declaring that he was not afraid to die, John amazed his physician, who protested that "young people are desireous of life." The cross-currents of evangelism in this account are particularly interesting, as the Catholic doctor attempted to bring Johnson back to the "mother church," knowing that Johnson had at one time been Catholic himself. Johnson then testified to his evangelical conversion, his association with the Methodists, and even to the remarkable call to preach despite his ignorance. Here the doctor protested, claiming that only qualified priests ought to preach. Johnson proudly recalled his rejoinder:

> My answer was if I saw a man in a feaver and had a medicine that wou'd cure him, must I not give it him because I was not a phisitian? I told him I wou'd, and on the same principles was resolv'd to preach. I told him I had preach'd and determin'd so to do as long as I had breath. (God grant I may keep my word).

Having found Johnson steadfast, the doctor questioned him no more, refusing a fee after his patient made a full recovery. Johnson averred, "I gained more by that feavour than by anything that ever befell me."[528]

In non-autobiographical accounts, authors often revealed how the subject's suffering affected them. This was sometimes discerned through the episodes that the author had chosen to highlight, though it was sometimes made more explicit. In the account of Mrs. Davis's breast surgery, the author (an unnamed friend) began by recording Davis's extraordinary calm and consciousness throughout the extremely

[528] John Johnson to Charles Wesley, 7 February 1760, EMV 91.

painful home operation. About two-thirds of the way into the account, the friend suddenly switched to her own experience of being present, finishing with an examination of her own feelings and reckonings with fear and death:

> While they sowed up the blood vessel, she said, "The pain is very great." She called on the Lord to strengthen her and said, "I'm faint." And while she was going to receive some drops from the hands of a friend, I fainted away. The cause of my fainting is quite hid from me at present, for during the whole time I found my soul intirely stayed on the Lord. I was assured if she dyed death would not separate us from Christ, and being confident that every pain she endured would be sanctified to the good of her soul, I felt no degree of fear. I was intirely happy and the language of my soul was, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart on peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." When I recovered my fainting, I thought I was with my redeemer, and his love constrained me to praise him aloud.[529]

It appears that Davis's spiritual resolve and mastery of her body provoked an out-of-body experience in her friend. Taken in isolation, the friend's experience could almost be mistaken for an excerpt of a classical conversion account: she felt herself unusually close to Jesus, which enabled her to overcome her fear of death. The difference is that her fear was not for herself, but for her friend. It was sympathy which led her to manifest physically the fainting that Davis only spoke of. In this way, the friend partially embodied Davis's suffering, so that her own sympathetic body became the site of divine transformation. Of this same account, Phyllis Mack writes that it "underscores the Methodists' devaluation of the body as a site of spiritual perception and expression… the body itself was no longer seen as a locus of spiritual ecstasy or authority. Mrs. Davis's friend was not witnessing a martyr's glory. She knew that God accepted the pain as an

[529] Account of Mrs. Davis's operation, 1 July 1758, EMV 48.

offering, and she also hoped her friend would recover."[530] The prayer of the friend, however, was not a prayer for recovery. It was, rather, an attempt to resign herself to God's will, whether Davis died or lived. The friend commended Davis to the Lord and received assurance that Christ would remain with them both, even in the event of death.

In many accounts, the ideal of patient resignation was signaled by the report that the individual died "without a sigh or groan."[531] While groaning was appropriate for someone undergoing convictions prior to conversion, it was not a positive indicator while dying. Such expressions signified that the person was still longing for deliverance from sin and pain. The dying individual ought to evince a patient resignation in the face of suffering, even a joyful countenance at the thought of meeting Jesus—but certainly not mournful sighs or groans. In one instance, a dying girl was even exhorted by her doctors "not to sigh or mourn," as they claimed it "render'd their medicins ineffectual."[532] In a letter to Charles Wesley, Ann Davis admitted that her excruciating physical pain made her "groan with bitter groanings indeed." She longed for patience, that she might be enabled to partake of Jesus' sufferings "without a murmuring groan."[533]

Evangelism of the dying

After the first three volumes of the *Arminian Magazine*, John Wesley began including deathbed narratives, explaining that "nothing is more animating to serious

[530] Phyllis Mack, "Does Gender Matter? Suffering and Salvation in Eighteenth-Century Methodism," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 85, no. 2 (2003), 169.
[531] For example, Samuel Franks to Charles Wesley of J. Mathews' death, 28 December 1764, EMV 109.
[532] Brother Lambertson to Charles Wesley, 1755, EMV 99.
[533] Ann Davis to Charles Wesley, 25 April 1766, EMV 47. It is possible that this is the same Mrs. Davis mentioned above.

people than the dying Words and Behaviour of the Children of God."[534] It is evident that earlier lay people were also in agreement. In approaching the deathbed, spectators hoped to see signs of assurance and resignation in the dying person's comportment. They also, however, expected to hear words of advice and encouragement that would benefit their own souls, and to be transformed by the event of another being "transported." Susannah Designe reflected upon the death of Mrs. Vigor's son, "O the abundant love of God to take one into the storehouse of the dead to drive the rest to Christ and make them eager to hasten after."[535] She prayed that the evangelical potential of this death would encourage the work of God in Mrs. Vigor's soul. A spectator at the death of John Perronet, L. Elliott was profoundly touched by Perronet's patience in suffering, his "happy testimony" of faith, the manner of his dying breath, and the consolation toward his siblings, which were "such as [he] never before saw on the like ocation." Elliott affirmed, "Twas in mercy made an awful profitable time to my soul, which I hope and trust will be lasting."[536]

Dying persons enjoyed a special status as they approached the gates of heaven. They seemed to exist in a kind of semi-divine state, which rendered them exceptionally trustworthy. Brother Lambertson's daughter was fully aware of this concept, assuming her role as evangelist to her friends and family, saying, "You may believe me, I am a dying person." To three of her friends she exhorted: "I desire you to seek happiness for your souls; it is not barely going to church or meeting will be sufficient. But it must be

[534] *The Arminian Magazine* 4 (March 1781), 153.
[535] Susannah Designe to Charles Wesley, 18 March 1742, EMV 51.
[536] L. Elliott to Charles Wesley, 17 December 1767, EMV 57.

leaving the world in affection and turning to God with our whole heart." Turning then to her siblings, she expressed her hopes that they might "get into the company of the few serious young persons and not have this blessing to seek upon a death bed."[537]

Similarly, the Irish Methodist Jonathan Handy knew that the deathbed gave added weight to his testimony. He encouraged his friends, "For your souls sake, beleive the words of a dieing man," and exhorted them to put aside their trifling and stubborn ways while there was still time. He claimed that his dying status provided him with a clearer perspective regarding the state of his friends' souls: "My eyes are open, I se your danger; there is a grate worke to be doon upon you all or you are for ever undoon." One of his acquaintances approached the deathbed seeking a word of comfort in his time of spiritual struggle. Handy refused to provide false assurance, responding, "I have not wan word of comfort for you till you are able to give up your will unto the Lord. He is worthy."[538]

Even fifteen-year-old Amy Winter felt compelled to make special declarations once she found herself "seized for death." She gathered her parents and family members around her, "exhort[ing] them to repentance and a godly life and to follow the Lamb, whethir so ever he goeth." The also offered a prayer specifically for the clergy, "that the Lord would enligten their understanding and open their eyes." In her final prayer, she petitioned God to give increased grace to all people, that they might hear the word and live accordingly.[539]

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[537] Brother Lambertson to Charles Wesley, 1755, EMV 99.
[538] Hannah Handy to Charles Wesley, 1759, DDPr 1/35, MARC.
[539] Elizabeth Winter to Charles Wesley, 15 April 1745, EMV 139.

At times, authors found themselves either pressed for time or emotional energy, or otherwise unable to construct a full narrative immediately. In these cases, they simply compiled a list of last words with minimal additions. The list of Francis Vigor's last words ("or words to this effect") presented a comprehensive summary of the essentials of his faith, at least according to the author. Vigor prayed that he might be made fit for eternity, praised Jesus for his atoning sacrifice, affirmed his acceptance of death should it be God's will, and expressed love for all humanity and the desire to work together for the Lord should he happen to recover. In closing, he quoted Charles Wesley's hymn written three years earlier, "O for a thousand tounges to speak my dear redeemer's praise."[540]

Some dying persons told spectators that they, too, would soon follow them to heaven. M. Clark, for instance, a few moments before her death suddenly turned to her friend and said, "You shall come soon!"[541] Whether this served as encouragement (our suffering will soon be over), a gentle warning (our time on earth is very short), or rather confirmation of a supernatural prescience was not always clear. It seems likely that all three were implied, and that the statement was meant to evoke at once comfort, perseverance and godly living in the survivors.

Preachers fell under particular pressure to make their last words as edifying as possible. The later explanation in the *Methodist Magazine* seems to hold true in earlier decades: "'were [the preacher's] sun to set under a cloud, it would considerable weaken the testimony he had borne, in his public ministrations and private instruction…' A

[540] Francis Vigor's last words, 1742, EMV 132. See *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740): "Glory to God, and Praise and Love."
[541] M. Clark's death, 1760, EMV46.

triumphant death 'is the most authentic seal he can set in this world, to the truth of his own testimony.'"[542] Reverend Jones rose admirably to the challenge. During his dramatic monologue, he looked down at his hands and said, "He will soon take away these filthy garments and give me changed [sic] of raiment." Jones exhorted Jesus to secure his soul, then said after a pause, "He will! He will! I have part here, but I shall have all soon!" After quoting numerous scripture passages, adjuring the Lord to "feed thy sheep," and affirming his confidence in his salvation, Jones began pastorally preparing his spectators for the physical changes of death. "Don't be surprized at any alterations you may see in me, for death makes strange alterations." He encouraged them instead to rejoice over his dead body, and to give thanks for their past sufferings and future enjoyment in heaven.[543]

Fourteen years later, Thomas Rutherford sent an account of Brother Mencthorp's death to John Wesley, in which Mencthorp offered his response to the expectations imposed on ministers: "People expect that preachers will say great things when they die, but what can I say? I am only a sinner at the feet of mercy, and it's good to be there."[544] This response proved unsatisfactory for John Wesley's purposes. Though Rutherford commended it for publication, John noted on the narrative, "Not useful I think."

A few narratives noted alterations in the quality of the dying voice. In his account of Mr. Watts's death, Joseph Dornford wrote that Watts's pains were "amazingly taken away" a few days before his death, and that he kept his senses until the end. Just a few

[542] *Methodist Magazine* 23 (1800), 291.
[543] Dying words of Reverend Jones, 5 June 1762, EMV 96.
[544] Thomas Rutherford to John Wesley, 30 November 1776, Letters to John Wesley box 2, MARC.

moments before he died, someone asked if he was able to look up. He replied, "'Yes,' louder than ordinary, and his lips kept going till he expired."[545] While he lay dying, Alexander White received a visit from a local merchant. Upon hearing his guest exclaim, "Poor man!," White responded "quick and louder than [his spectators] thought possible, 'Poor man! Rich in Christ, rich in Christ.'"[546] Brother Lambertson's daughter likewise experienced augmented vocal powers in her last moments:

> About half an hour before she departed, she broke out with an audible voice (not like a dying [son]), "O! Sweet Jesus! O! Jesus, it's sweet! It's sweet! It's comfortable, it's delightfull!" And in a little time resign'd her soul into the arms of Jesus without either sigh or moan.[547]

It does not appear that this phenomenon had any particular spiritual significance, though it enhanced the impression that the dying person was on the cusp of being translated into a new realm of life and vitality.

Methodists were clearly disappointed when they were not able to receive edifying last words. Authors almost always included them in the narratives, even resorting to commenting on the cry of one's soul if actual words were somewhat distorted or missing altogether. In his report of his mother's death, however, George Downing was unable to offer any dying words, as his mother "had not enjoyed her senses for many hours before her death," and did not recognize anyone. He noted that he would have "rejoiced to have heard her triumphing in Christ," but he supposed that "God knows the dispensation that is

[545] Joseph Dornford to Charles Wesley, 23 June 1763, EMV 135.
[546] Charles Wesley to Sarah Gwynne junior, 30 December 1748, DDCW 5/11, MARC.
[547] Brother Lambertson to Charles Wesley, 1755, EMV 99.

most suitable for us." He was consoled by that fact that "she went off very easily, without a groan or sigh."[548]

Dying visions

In his study of Methodist deathbed scenes in the *Arminian Magazine*, Bell notes the "seemingly timeless belief that the dying receive a clearer revelation of truth and a supernatural insight into the future."[549] Thus far, this has been demonstrated by the reverence paid to testimonies of dying persons, as well as an uncanny prescience about their own death and the future death of their family and friends. "Momentarily lingering on the borderlands of two worlds, 'why may they not, when just leaving one, catch some glimpses of the other?'"[550] While attending the deathbed of Alexander White, Charles Wesley "earnestly beg'd his prayers, *especially when his soul should be on the brink of its departure*."[551] Dying persons fully expected to receive further revelations and insights on the other side. Mr. Evans, for example, expressed his confidence to spectators thus: "My eye sight fails me, but I shall soon see clearly."[552] Though the language appears to be somewhat metaphorical, it accords well with the previously-discussed conception of spiritual sight – that as Christians matured spiritually, their spiritual senses (including the "eye of faith") became more active, aiding in the perception of spiritual realities. It is no surprise, then, that as one approached death, these spiritual faculties were further augmented to help individuals transition into their heavenly state.

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[548] George Downing to Charles Wesley, 15 November 1758, DDPr 1/22, MARC.
[549] Bell, "'Our People Die Well,'" 214.
[550] D. W. Clark, ed., *Deathbed Scenes; or, Dying with and without Religion: Designed to Illustrate the Truth and Power of Christianity* (New York: Lane and Scott, 1851), 16.
[551] Charles Wesley to Sarah Gwynne junior, 30 December 1748, DDCW 5/11, MARC (emphasis mine).
[552] Mr. Evans' death, 6 April 1763, EMV 58.

In addition to employing metaphorical language of sight, some accounts also reported that dying individuals witnessed particular visions as they approached death. These visions ranged from vague impressions to experiences bordering on out-of-body. In the account of her friend's death, Elizabeth Blackwell wrote that after the friend's speech was taken away, "her actions spoke as if she saw the great invisible."[553] Fifteen-year-old Amy Winter was reported to have seen "a chariot waiting for her to carry her over a fine green into paradise." She then saw the gates of heaven opening for her, and, the instant before her death, an angel coming for her.[554] Others claimed themselves to be already in paradise in their last moments. Mr. Keene, for instance, called to his son, "looked earnestly on him and said, 'O my son, what a distance thou art from me. I am within the gates of the city!'"[555] Similarly, Jonathan Handy proclaimed to his friends, "I shall soon be looking doun upon you all strugling upon your jurney. Why… it is so allredy for I am walking the goulden streets. Behould, a Cristian dieing, triumphing over death, hell and the greave."[556]

In the case of Elizabeth Hurst, she found herself transported into both heaven and hell, getting a sneak peek at those already deceased as well as those not yet translated. The day before being confined to her bed during her final illness, Hurst experienced an unusual vision in which she was first brought into hell and persuaded to resign her children to Jesus (this will be further addressed shortly). As she was exiting hell, she caught sight of a neighbor who was "tumbling into hell as it were neck and heals

[553] Elizabeth Blackwell to Charles Wesley, 10 March 1763, EMV 27.
[554] Elizabeth Winter to Charles Wesley, 15 April 1745, EMV 139.
[555] J. Richardson to Charles Wesley, 1 April 1766, EMV 98.
[556] John Houghton to Charles Wesley, 1759, DDPr 1/35.

together." The vision proved to be prophetic, as the neighbor was found dead the next morning in the very same posture, having gone to bed drunk the night before. Hurst was then brought into heaven, where she saw her sister-in-law, who had died ten months before. She also saw several departed Methodist preachers and laity, as well as the reserved places of some who were still alive. Though she wished to see John Wesley's place, she was not allowed, presumably "for fear the people should notise him." She was given a glimpse of John Nelson's place, which caused the author to suspect that Nelson's days on earth would soon come to an end. Hurst begged to be allowed to stay, but the Lord told her she would return to earth for a few days before permanently assuming her place in heaven. The author noted in a postscript that Hurst confirmed the authenticity of her vision until her death.[557]

Resignation and longing for death

It has been mentioned in previous chapters that "overcoming the fear of death was a primary standard of conversion" for early Methodists.[558] Unsurprisingly, the actual experience of dying had the potential to reawaken such fears. For this reason, friends and family posed questions to assure themselves of the dying person's confidence during the final moments of life, but also to exhort the individual to overcome those fears if necessary.[559] The question "Are you afraid to die?" returned at the deathbed in various forms. As Sister Hopkins lay dying, her friend Mrs. Gee asked if she had any fear. Hopkins admitted that she had a little, to which Gee responded, "Fear not the Lord, his

[557] Isaac Duckworth to Charles Wesley, 11 April 1773, EMV 54.
[558] Mack, "Does Gender Matter?" 166.
[559] Ibid.

near." About an hour later, during which Hopkins endured "great conflict," Gee asked again if any fear remained. This time, Hopkins declared that Jesus had freed her and had "quicken[ed] her soul."[560]

Some confident Methodists volunteered this evidence without being asked for it. Just before her final illness, Jane Cowper received divine comfort that dispelled her long-held fears. She related to a fellow band member, "I have always from a child had a fear that at the hour of death I should have great conflicts and not be able to endure, but this day God has assured me I shall finish my course with joy." Upon hearing that she had smallpox, she responded, "I can't be frightened at the will of God… I shall dye a lump of deformity, but I shall meet you all glorious." When questioned by John Wesley about her salvation, she replied that had "kept the faith and there is no fear in love, perfect love [drives] out fear."[561] Joan Webb recalled that after receiving the witness of the spirit, her "fears and doughts" disappeared, enabling her to survive a serious illness. She wrote, "I was no more afraid to death than I was to go to my bed, for I had a strong wittness that the Lord would finish his work before he would take me." She declared that she was as sure of her future deliverance as she was of the fact of her death.[562] Though she did not die from that particular illness, she manifested the same confidence that would later be expected of her on the deathbed.

The ideal state of the dying Methodist seems to have been perfect resignation to the will of God, whether that be sickness or health, life or death. When asked if she had

[560] William Hopkins to Charles Wesley, 5 December 1765, EMV 88.
[561] Death of Jane Cowper, 1763, EMV 45.
[562] Joan Webb to Charles Wesley, May 1742, EMV 136.

any particular sense of whether she should die or live, Jane Cowper replied, "No, only from the nature of the disorder, but I feel his will so precious that it is impossible to chuse."[563] At times, however, the narratives evince an attitude toward death that surpasses neutral acceptance, moving towards an active preference for death over life. Sally Chapone wrote to Charles Wesley that her father "not only dyed without fear, but even with desire."[564] While it was perfectly customary to express a longing to be with Jesus, a clear desire for death met with some controversy. Many Methodists cried out in their last moments, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!" This exclamation taken from Revelation 22:20 was part of the standard script of the deathbed drama, indicating that the dying person was ready to fly into the arms of the savior. Even a slight change of language, however, could approach dubious territory. The dialogue between Jonathan Handy and his wife Hannah reveal something of this uncertainty. Hannah recounted the conversation:

> He said, "my dear, pray for a speedy release, if you don't think it sinfull. Let it not my Lord displase that I would die to be his geast." I said "I chose to lave that to God. You suffer little pain. He dales graceiously with you." "True," said he, "but I am in the pangs of death. Lord make me faithfull, Lord make me faithfull."

While Jonathan wished his death would be hastened, Hannah was reluctant to ask God to work more swiftly, preferring to let things take their natural course, as Jonathan did not suffer extreme physical pain.

Phyllis Mack points out that the issue of desiring death became a bone of contention between Charles and John Wesley. For Charles, one's entire life constituted a

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[563] Death of Jane Cowper, 1763, EMV 45.
[564] Sally Chapone to Charles Wesley, 5 January 1736, EMV 39.

journey toward sanctification, which did not exclude spiritual struggles, doubts or even the desire for death as part of faithful living. For John, however, sanctification was a sudden, transformative event during life which eradicated all fear and anxiety, resulting in a permanent state of joy. He therefore criticized the "'poisonous mysticism' that gave a gloomy cast to many of Charles's hymns."[565] Thoughout his life, Charles Wesley suffered many health problems, which certainly affected his ordinary disposition. Even as a young man, he often longed for death, hoping that his worldly afflictions would soon be brought to an end. Though he was not suicidal, strictly speaking, Charles's yearnings to quit the earthly terrain were both frequent and fervent.

In December of 1748, Charles attended the death of Alexander White. This experience moved him profoundly, and it demonstrates the intense pathos of his sincere wish to follow White to heaven. At one point, White announced that the chariot was waiting for him, and that he wished Charles might join him. Charles responded "in a flood of tears" that he wished so, too. White then comforted himself and Charles, saying that an earthly lifetime is but a moment in heaven; therefore, he was sure to see Charles soon. Charles recalled that the shortness of life gave him the greatest consolation, and he was convinced that White warned him in an even more particular manner than the others: "You all will follow soon, but you sooner than the rest!" Though Charles supposed this may have been because others in the room were younger, he confessed his hope that there was something "prophetical" in those words. A few moments later, Charles requested that White transmit a message ("if permitted") to his friends and family already in

[565] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 57.

paradise, saying that he would soon join them. White consoled Charles, as though already speaking from heaven, "We shall expect you… but wait only for one moment, and the days of your mourning shall be ended." White eventually died after Charles had departed the house, but his widow along with Sister Somerset confirmed that his "last triumphant moments" were full of prayers specifically for Charles. At one point, Sister Somerset "was constrained to say, 'What don't you love Mr. John, and pray for him' 'Yes, yes,' he answered, 'but Charles, Charles!' as if he would say Charles is more especially laid upon my heart." With his dying breath, White "called out with a loud voice, 'Charles!' and went away like a lamb without a single groan." This circumstance convinced Charles that God was promising him a "sudden discharge." He exclaimed, "O that I were fit to follow him now! Lord, cut short thy work and receive me, even me, to thy bosom!"[566]

John Wesley was not the only critic of Charles's melancholic temper. A. Nowel wrote to caution Charles against speaking too freely to others about his longing for death. Nowel admitted his sympathy, confessing that he "could allmost say 'Amen' to [Charles's] prayer." He pastorally encouraged Charles to take care against speaking from the "bitterness of [his] soul," saying that if the circumstances were reversed, Charles would never point someone toward death as the "remedy of their woe." While Nowel himself doubted that his own sorrows would be removed in his lifetime, he nevertheless

[566] Charles Wesley to Sarah Gwynne junior, 30 December 1748, DDCW 5/11, MARC. Charles also notes that the occasion inspired him to begin composing the hymn, "O what a soul, transporting sight."

concealed such thoughts "in regard to the good of others." He encouraged Charles to "wait upon the Lord," as Charles himself would encourage others.[567]

Family and grief

Feelings toward death were not always so easily manageable, whether one was dying, anticipating the death of another, or grieving a loss. Early Methodists worked hard to master their feelings and to present themselves appropriately. In his report of Alexander White's death, Charles Wesley praised the comportment of White's widow, "an happy window indeed." Upon meeting Charles after the death, she cried, "O! Sir, I have lost the best of husbands, a faithful sharer of all my joys and sorrows, but the Lord has him, and I would not have him back."[568] This almost joyful offering of a loved one was the ideal response for both dying individuals and their family members. The earthly ties of family were not always so easily sacrificed, though. Both men and women alike struggled to let go at times, though women seem to be particularly questioned in this area. For instance, Sister Rogers was asked the day before her death if "she was willing to die and live her famely." She responded appropriately, saying that "she was, for she commited them into the hands of the Lord, wome she nue wold [sic] care for them."[569] While on his deathbed, Jonathan Handy questioned his wife about her willingness to follow him to heaven, and likewise her willingness to let him go. Near the end, he seemed to sense that her prayers were preventing him from dying. He asked her, "My

[567] A. Nowel to Charles Wesley, 5 July 1749, EMV 114.
[568] Charles Wesley to Sarah Gwynne junior, 30 December 1748, DDCW 5/11, MARC.
[569] Mary Francis to Charles Wesley, 28 June 1745, EMV 61.

dear, can you now willingly let me go to your father and my father?" She recalled, "I was just then examining of my self in that mater and said, 'Cherfully I can.'"[570]

Too-strong attachments on the part of loved ones could potentially delay the death of a suffering person. In addition, too-strong attachments on the part of the dying person could actually prevent them from reaching heaven. The day before she became ill, Elizabeth Gill received a visitor while she was breastfeeding her child. She remarked to her guest, "I do not know what I should do if the Lord was to take this child from me. I find my heart sett upon it so." A voice then said to her, "Where art thou a going? Eternity is at hand, and thou art in this unhappy state." Though it is not specifically mentioned that she overcame this particular attachment, it appears that she attained a satisfactory state shortly before her death.[571]

Elizabeth Hurst similarly struggled with her "excessive" love for her children. The author of her dying account (her brother-in-law and class leader) noted that he had rebuked her several times for idolizing her children. This seems to have caused her great distress, until finally one night, she received a startling vision. She found herself transported to the brink of hell and began to sink into a pit of thousands of tormented souls. There she was again reproached for "seting her affections more on her children then on the Lord." As the flames increased, Jesus appeared suddenly and said to her, "Give me thy children and I will help thee out of this place." She offered all children except her "sucking babe." Jesus then withdrew from her, and she continued sinking until she cried out for him to take them all. After hiding a few more moments, Jesus

[570] Hannah Handy to Charles Wesley, 1759, DDPr 1/35, MARC.
[571] The Death of Elizabeth Gill, November 1764, EMV 64.

reappeared and pulled her out by the hand. She died six days later, apparently in a state of perfect peace and happiness.[572]

A number of scholars have commented on the complexity of grief and emotion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Anne Laurence, seventeenth-century diarists rejected excessive grief as something which ran contrary to the will of God. As God had chosen to call one of his children to himself, that divine prerogative must be accepted and respected.[573] Similarly, Henry Rack observes this ideal of emotional restraint in early seventeenth-century Puritanism. After the death of his daughter, Nehemiah Wallington found himself in such grief that his wife felt compelled to rebuke him for offending God. She proceeded to remind him how much trouble they had been spared, as well as how much sorrow their daughter had been spared. Rack notes that this "mixed attitude survived or revived among evangelicals" in the eighteenth century.[574] While grief was evident in many of the narratives, it often served as a "frame for the inspirational story."[575] In the narrative of the Cornish preacher Edward Dunstone, the emotion of his companion permitted Dunstone's calm compassion to shine through.

> A little before his death, Mary Render of Bradford being with him, and observing his strength decay, she was pensive and sad, and being sat in the room she felt an unusual presence of the Lord, even so as to seize upon her bodily strength. She believed he was that moment struck with death. She got up from the seat on which she sat, and went to the bedside to see if she co'd see any visible mark of death. She saw a great change in him, all expectations of recovery fled away, which caused her to weep. He perceiving the tears flow from her eyes put forth his hand and wiped them away, saying, "Why are you so cast down? Will you go with me?" She answered, "I wish I might." A few hours after he broke out in

[572] Isaac Duckworth to Charles Wesley, 11 April 1773, EMV 54.
[573] Anne Laurence, "Godly Grief: Individual Responses to Death in Seventeenth-Century Britain" in *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 75.
[574] Rack, "Evangelical Endings," 44.
[575] Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 91.

> prayer saying, "O Lord, take us into thy care and heavenly benediction and into thy heavenly kingdom for evermore." And then resigned his breath.[576]

For early Methodists, feelings served distinct purposes at distinct times. It would never do, for instance, to arrive at justification without some sense of joy, or without first having passed through the requisite sorrow and anguish. Likewise, excessive distress surrounding death and dying was problematic. Even Charles Wesley with his slightly melancholic temperament rejoiced in "blessed deaths" of the faithful. In reporting a friend's death to Charles Wesley, Elizabeth Blackwell confessed her inappropriate grief, saying that the "language of [her] heart was so deferent" from what Charles presumed. She wrote that her spirits were so sunk that she was unable to write or speak of her friend, and that she still harbored "that sort of fealing that [Charles] would blame."[577]

Though the personal attachments of men appeared less frequently as stumbling blocks in the early narratives, it did sometimes happen that men wrote of their own struggles to accept the loss of a spouse. In one of the most moving narratives in the Early Methodist Volumes, William Hopkins wrote of his deep love and affection for his wife of twenty-three years and of his difficulty in releasing her to Jesus. Her own affection seemed to equal his, as she was reported to have said to him often, "O my dear, I love you to a faulte. O that I could love the Lord Jesus more and you less, then I should be happy indeed." Avowing that he would have gladly bought her life with his own, Hopkins then described his experience at her bedside:

> I then, kneeling down with a few friends which was preasant, gave thanks to the Lord for what he had done for her soul. I then took her by the hand and ask her

[576] Mr. Edward Dunstone's Dying Words, John Bennet Letter Book, 25.
[577] Elizabeth Blackwell to Charles Wesley, 10 March 1763, EMV 27.

> iff she was willing to go to her savior. She said, "Yes, but you won't lett me go," meaning as I suppose my not being willing to give her up, for she had often before desir'd me not to pray for her life. O who can tell the smart of parting with such a friend?

Hopkins confessed that the task of writing would have been too difficult had Charles not specifically requested it. He then thanked Charles for his previous visit and especially for his admonition: "You told me as soon as I could intirely give her up, the Lord would do what was best." Having recounted his wife's steadfastness in the faith, her devotion to the Methodist society (she had been a member for twenty-five years) and her patient suffering in dying, he praised her as the ideal companion: "such a loveing and tender friend is very rare to be mett with."[578]

Problematic deaths

While the formal narratives typically presented variations on the ideal death, some manuscripts evinced concern for those whose last moments were, for one reason or another, disturbing. Henry Rack notes the problematic nature of sudden deaths, as they robbed the dying person of the opportunity to offer strong testimonies and to demonstrate assurance of faith.[579] While authors did what they could to salvage evidence from the dying person's life, certain circumstances surpassed the skill of even the most savvy biographer.

Writing of her brother's death, Rachel Hawthorn expressed concern about his final struggle. Though the majority of the narrative follows a typical pattern of relating the dying person's patience in suffering, longing to be with Christ, praying for the

[578] William Hopkins to Charles Wesley, 5 December 1765, EMV 88.
[579] Rack, "Evangelical Endings," 46.

Methodists, the last episode failed to correspond with the ideals of either a glorious triumph or a peaceful passing. On the day of his death, Hawthorn's brother found himself vigorously assaulted by the devil. He cried out, "I fear, I fear to be out of Christ, oh treabel, treable." After being questioned as to the cause of his fear, he responded, "Because my Lord is so long in coming. Why, why tarreth my Lord?" Just before his dying breath, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, make me pertaker of thy divine nature." This ambiguous ending caused Hawthorn "great uneasiness," as she could not comprehend how someone who previously manifested patient resignation could suffer such conflicts at the end. She noted that her sister had also just died, and that the loss of both was almost too much to bear. Hawthorne closed with a request for comforting words from Charles.[580] It appears that both her brother's questionable state upon death and the unfairness of his suffering raised serious questions for Hawthorne, who had not the strength to try to make sense of it.

In 1762, William Ellis wrote to Charles Wesley of the disturbing illness of one who considered himself to be perfect. He had heard that the man was "cursing and blasphemeing" upon his deathbed, and so he went to the man's home to investigate for himself. Upon finding the report true, he exclaimed, "Oh my God, lay to thy hand, stop the torrent of errors. I can add no more. My greif and sorrow overcomes me." The correspondence cut off abruptly after Ellis expressed his distress over the "cause of God" and the souls of his brethren.[581] In this case, Ellis's concern was not only for the soul of

[580] Rachel Hawthorn to Charles Wesley, April 1743, EMV 84.
[581] William Ellis to Charles Wesley, 23 December 1762, EMV 56.

the dying man, but also for the entire evangelical enterprise which was threatened by the dying man's objectionable opinions and comportment.

Perhaps the most disagreeable death related in the Early Methodist Volumes is that of "poor Mrs. Clarke." Thomas Butts reported that, from what he was able to gather, she locked herself in her room before dinner and instructed her maid not to disturb her unless called for. She then proceeded to light herself on fire before summoning her maid by calmly tapping her stick against the floor. Upon approaching the bedroom door, the maid suddenly panicked and refused to enter alone. Accompanied by another servant, they entered together to find Clarke "standing up right in the middle of the room, all in flames." Clarke suffered severe burns and died the next morning, having refused to tell anyone how the "accident" came about. Butts noticed that she seemed not in the least bit concerned for her soul, despite being on the brink of death, and that she did not especially wish to be prayed for. He further observed that she seemed most preoccupied by a "purse of money that she had left behind her chair." He concluded the account by commending her to God's mercy, and by hoping that "our souls may be profited by this and every other alarming providence." In this way, even a problematic death (properly narrated) could sometimes contribute to the saving of souls.[582]

Last-minute conversions

Despite the occasional "bad death," in general, there was nothing like the urgency of the deathbed to lay an individual under "serious impressions." Several accounts

[582] Thomas Butts to Charles Wesley, 28 January 1761, EMV 31.

related the last-minute conversions of those who were suddenly convinced of the need for salvation in their final illnesses.

The deathbed conversion of Jane Farmer must have been particularly satisfying to Methodists, as she had previously "joined with her neighbours in dispising and ridiculing them." She fell sick on Wednesday, January 11, 1748, but had not previously considered the destination of her soul in case of death. The fear of hell took hold of her, and she began to pray that she might know her sins forgiven before she died. This process, which could have taken a healthy individual months or years to accomplish, became even more stressful with an impending deadline. Though Farmer quickly received the sweetness and comfort of the *hope* of forgiveness of sins, the next day she fell into despair because she had not yet received actual assurance of that forgiveness. After intense struggles with Satan and other devils, crying out for Christ to speak forgiveness to her soul, she suddenly said, "Hark, what sweet heavenly musick and singing do I hear! Do not you hear it? O, there's a voice that tells me 'Thy sins are forgiven thee! Thy sins are forgiven thee!" While she was previously impatient to receive the sacrament before dying, she then declared, "Now I can die in peace if I do not receive the sacrament." The conversion having been accomplished, the narrative proceeded to address the traditional deathbed elements: exhorting spectators not to "triffle any longer," giving up her children and husband to God, etc. She even specified that her funeral ought to be carried out in "the plainest manner," as a grand funeral would do nothing for her soul. Though Farmer had lost her senses prior to her death, the author exhorted his readers "not to doubt in the

least of the safety of her condition." He concluded with further evangelism, addressing the reader directly:

> And when you have obtained an interest in Christ your Saviour and know your pardon is sealed in heaven, as she did then, and not till then, you will have a sure well-grounded hope of meeting her at the right hand of God.
>
> You deny the knowledge of forgiveness of sins here, and God has condescended to raise up among yourselves a witness of his truth. See that you shut not your eyes any longer against the light, least the things which belong to your everlasting peace be hid from you![583]

In the case of Sally Sparrow, another former Methodist opponent, her deathbed "conversion" is rendered dramatic by the fact that despite her unwavering devotion to Methodist activities, she still remained without the knowledge of God. After having been awakened by Methodist preaching, she comported herself in all earnestness. It seems that her own zeal in attending preaching led to her final illness, though someone has taken care to strike through that particular detail:

> Shee never mist any oppertunity, morning, evening or no one day. I have seen her morning and evening come 5 miles, middle leg deep in snow, raine and haile to hear the preaching, and that upon any consideration ~~until shee so much impared her health that shee could go no longer~~, and in a little time took to her bed. And having little or nothing to subsist upon, I tooke care shee should want for nothing.

After passing through the typical struggles and fears of damnation, Sparrow received her assurance along with a renewed vigor. James Jones reported that upon visiting her, "shee was redy leep oute of the bed, crying, 'O dear Mr. Jones, how I love you! I cannt tell you what God has don for my soule!'" Jones concluded the narrative by exalting in the power of the deathbed to strip away pride and pretense: "O were are the dareing harden'd witts of the age that can call this delusion, and hypocrisy and the like? Surely whatever deciet

[583] The Death of Jane Farmer, DDCW 7/110, MARC.

men in health and strength can shew yet, souls hovering over the brink of eaternity just going nakedly to stand before God, can then play no part of an hypocrite."[584]

Evangelization to the dying

In some cases, Methodist leaders and laity were specifically requested to render service at the deathbed. In other cases, however, they did not necessarily wait for an invitation. If a person whose soul was thought to be in a precarious position was known to be dying, the preacher sometimes took it upon himself to evangelize while there was still time.

In February of 1743, Charles Wesley received news that a certain Aaron Maw was gravely ill and was expected to die shortly. There is little other information about Maw except that Charles evidently considered his "pretious soul" to be in a precarious state. For this reason, Charles took his pen in a last-ditch effort to save Maw before it was too late. Over the course of several pages, Charles sped through the necessary conversion rhetoric, asking for Maw the questions he ought to have been asking himself: "O what must you do to be saved? How can you make your peace with God, before whom you will shortly appear?" Charles briefly reminded Maw of the sinful nature of all humanity, taking a quick tour through hell before turning to the salvific sacrifice of Jesus Christ. After driving home the personal nature of this salvation (Charles underlined the second-person pronoun seventeen times: "<u>you, even you</u>"), he made his final appeal:

> Our next meeting will be at the judgment seat of Christ. Fly to him therefore, I beseech you, while he may be found, the friend of sinners, and their advocate of life. In all probability you are now upon your death-bed. Within a few days, by the course of nature, your spirit must return. Cry then unto Jesus, mighty to save,

[584] James Jones to Charles Wesley, 24 December 1759, EMV 95.

> that he may apply his blood to your guilty soul, before you go hence, and are no more seen except I wash thee (himself says), thou hast no part with me, as yet you are not washed. You have not true faith in his blood, for faith is the gift of God. He that believeth hath the witness in himself. He that believeth hath everlasting life and shall never come into condemnation. But ask and this faith shall be given you. Seek and you shall find it. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This man still receiveth sinners. Still. He hath power to forgive sins upon earth, and is ready to speak to your heart. Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee. Then and not till then can you depart in peace, when your eyes have seen his salvation.[585]

Through the writing of this missive, Charles attempted to take his place by the deathbed. His appeals evoked both the law and the gospel as he offered the ultra-concentrated version of evangelism. Though he may not have received assurance that Maw was receptive to this gospel, Charles could at least rest secure in the knowledge that he had given his best effort.

In the case of William Naylor, Brother Lambertson brazenly visited Naylor "without any manner of invitation." Naylor was known to be "inclinable to all manner of sins and that to a very high degree." Lambertson recounted, "One would allmost ready to think he had been born in hell." Upon hearing that Naylor was gravely ill and confined to his room, Lambertson seized the opportunity to visit. Though Naylor explicitly forbade the presence of any religious person, his wife led Lambertson to the bedroom anyhow. Lambertson wrote, "No person can suppose the anger which appeared in his countenance." He seated himself without asking and proceeded to speak "in the tenderest maner" he could. These visits continued about twice a day for a week, until it pleased God to convince Naylor of his "deplorabl conditions." After two days of terrifying thoughts and visions, Naylor began to wonder if Jesus could have truly died for "such a

[585] Charles Wesley to Aaron Maw, 1743, EMV 106.

wretch" as he. A few days later, he was firmly convinced of his salvation and comported himself as an entirely different person. Though previously fond of strong liquor, he now refused them, saying, "It keeps me from praying, and it keeps me from my Saviour." In his last moments, Naylor reached out a hand to his wife. Lambertson wrote of the scene:

> She took hold of it and with broken accents said, "Did you want to say something to me, my dear?" Now this same man said to his wife only 5 weeks before his death he would curse her to his latest breath, now claspt her in his cold arms and with a much louder voice than he had spoke for a fortnight said, "God bless thee! God bless thee! God hath pardoned all the sins that ever I committed in my life. God bless you all praise God and sing!" And away he went triumphant to glory.[586]

Not everyone had a positive assessment of deathbed evangelism. Joseph Carter recalled visiting his sick mother in the countryside. There, he took the opportunity to communicate the "glad tidings of salvation" to her, as well as to everyone else he encountered. He claims that he testified to the love that he had undeservingly received, and that he "pressingly exhorted" the others to accept the same. Carter then left the countryside, and his mother eventually died during his absence. After her death, the person who had accompanied her in her dying moments criticized Carter for having caused his mother "great uneasiness in all her sickness," thereby preventing her from dying in peace. The companion tried to comfort her by reminding her of her good life and by reading from Dr. Hammond's *Practical Catechism*. Upon hearing the words "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates," Carter's mother reportedly cried out "that she was not reprobated, that she was in Jesus Christ, & soon died." Whereas the companion reproached Carter for the distress caused to his mother,

[586] Brother Lambertson to Charles Wesley, 29 January 1768, EMV 113.

Carter seized on these dying words as evidence of her salvation and therefore proof of the efficacy of his work. He wrote triumphantly, "Glorious reproach, would our Lord make me such an instrument to call all dead souls out of their dreadfull darkeness, to cry continualy unto him that they may have life."[587] The travail that prohibited a good death according to the companion yielded eminently desirable results in Carter's eyes.

Condemned malefactors

Knowledge of an impending death often provided fertile ground for last-minute evangelization. Certain Methodist preachers enjoyed considerable "success" with dying persons, particularly when ministering to prisoners awaiting execution. During this period, the death penalty was prescribed for a wide range of offenses, including minor theft and counterfeiting money. The goal was crime prevention rather than just punishment for specified offenses, as demonstrated by the popular saying, "Men are not hanged for stealing horses, but that horses may not be stolen."[588] As such frequent executions were unsustainable and unrealistic, only selected criminals were actually hanged. In order for such punishments to have an effect on the grand public, they had to be carried out in plain view of the people (which had already been the case for centuries). In London, this spectacle began with the procession from Newgate prison, in which prisoners would be released from their chains and transported in a horse-drawn cart to the Tyburn, approximately three miles away. The duration of the journey lasted anywhere from one to three hours, depending on the density of the crowds, who followed alongside

[587] Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741, EMV 17.
[588] Joanna Cruickshank, "Singing at the Scaffold: Charles Wesley's Hymns for Condemned Malefactors," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 56, no. 3, (October 2007), 139.

the cart.[589] The spectacles at Tyburn provided plenty of opportunities for money-making, including the selling of prime viewing places and of pamphlets of the malefactor's dying account.[590] There was often a farewell speech by the prisoners before the noose was placed and the horse-drawn cart upon which they were standing pulled away.

On July 10, 1738, Charles Wesley made his first visit to prisoners at Newgate. At the request of Mr. Sparks, he went reluctantly and "with a heavy heart." He explained, "My old prejudices against the possibility of a death-bed repentance still hung upon me, and I could hardly hope there was mercy for those whose time was so short." While preaching, however, a "sudden spirit of faith" came upon him, and he fervently offered pardon to any who would repent and believe. Two days later, he returned to Newgate and engaged in serious conversation with a "poor black that had robbed his master." Charles described Christ's sufferings on behalf of lost sinners in general, and the prisoner in particular. The felon "listened with all the signs of eager astonishment. The tears trickled down his cheeks while he cried, 'What! Was it for me? Did God suffer all this for so poor a creature as me!'" Charles visited four more times before execution day, preaching to his "poor happy black" and the other prisoners. Just before the execution, Charles spent the night in the cell with the prisoners, who were "all delightfully cheerful." Together they sang "Behold the Saviour of Mankind," a hymn of Samuel

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[589] Simon Devereaux, "Recasting the Theatre of Execution: The Abolition of the Tyburn Ritual," *Past and Present*, No. 202 (Feb. 2009), 128; Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 52.
[590] Spierenburg, *Spectacle of Suffering*, 52, 91; Sambudha Sen, "Hogarth, Egan, Dickens, and the Making of an Urban Aesthetic," *Representations*, 103, no. 1 (Summer 2008), 89.

Wesley, Sr.[591] On Wednesday morning, July 19, the Ordinary (the prison chaplain) read prayers, preached "most miserably," and administered sacrament to the ten prisoners. Both Charles and the Ordinary offered prayers, then the prisoners' chains were struck off and their hands tied. All were transported to Tyburn in an hour. Once at the gallows, Charles stood upon the cart with two of the prisoners. Though the Ordinary tried to follow, the prisoners "begged he might not come, and the mob kept him down." Charles prayed that God would demonstrate a "power superior to the fear of death." He described the countenance of the prisoners thus:

> Newington had quite forgot his pain. They were all cheerful; full of comfort, peace, and triumph; assuredly persuaded Christ had died for them and waited to receive them into paradise. Greenaway was impatient to be with Christ.
>
> The black had spied me coming out of the coach, and saluted me with his looks. As often as his eyes met mine, he smiled with the most composed, delightful countenance I ever saw. Read caught hold of my hand in a transport of joy. Newington seemed perfectly pleased. Hudson declared he was never better, or more at ease, in mind and body. None showed any natural terror of death – no fear, or crying, or tears. All expressed their desire of our following them to paradise. I never saw such calm triumph, such incredible indifference to dying.

Charles bade farewell to each individually, then the cart drove off. Unlike a hanging with a sharp drop, this method could leave the felon struggling for over half an hour, thus adding to the circus-like atmosphere of the spectacle. Of these newly-converted malefactors, however, Charles wrote that "not one stirred, or struggled for life, but meekly gave up their spirits." Charles spoke a few "suitable words" to the crowd, then

[591] This hymn would become a classic execution hymn throughout the eighteenth century, continuing its popularity into current hymnals.

left rejoicing for his friends' fate. He exclaimed, "That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life."[592]

In November of 1738, Charles Wesley received an account of dying malefactors from an associate who had also visited the prison with Mr. Sparks and Mr. Bray. Though the prisoners exhibited more varied reactions to evangelical efforts, the account is quite similar to that of Charles's initial experience. The author exclaimed, "It would have delighted you to have heard and seen their sighs and groans and tears at hearing of Christ given for us." At one point, one convinced prisoner helped to convert his neighbor, exhorting him to believe that God loved him: "Supose one of them that are passing by should offer to die in your place tomorrow. Would not he love you? But Christ has done this for you." Like Charles, the author described an intensely joyful scene under the gallows. In order to prevent the Ordinary from interfering, he sang the same Samuel Wesley hymn, "Behold the Saviour of Mankind." After the execution had been accomplished, the Methodist leaders spoke to the crowd, which led to several of the spectators attending preaching that same evening.[593]

Though the primary goal of this sort of evangelism was simply to evince a sound conversion sometime prior to death, the preachers preferred to have a bit of a margin between conversion and execution. In Wales, A. Nowel and Thomas Price were considerably worried about a criminal named Josiah who resisted up to the very last possible moment. They reported that the "poor creature" remained in a dangerous condition up to moment when the cart stopped under the gallows. Shortly before the

[592] CWJ, vol. 1, 10-19 July 1738, 133, 136-139.
[593] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 11 November 1738, EMV 142.

execution, the felon attempted to commit suicide by cutting his neck with an old knife. This greatly alarmed Nowel and Price, who considered it a "dreadful omen" indicative of a "reprobate mind." They were equally surprised when, after taking his place under the gallows, the "miserable creature" gave a "very earnest and strong discourse" to the spectators. Mr. Glasscot (another Methodist associate, it seems) then prayed and questioned the felon as to his state. The criminal declared that he was not afraid of death, that he had a strong assurance, and that he gave himself freely to God. Nowel and Price wrote to Charles Wesley of their great joy and relief at this "unexpected turn."[594]

Though the Methodist leaders were clearly pleased with the results of their efforts, not everyone shared the same positive evaluation of evangelism to condemned malefactors. While Charles Wesley enjoyed free access to Newgate in 1738, a few years later he had considerable trouble gaining entrance to the prison. Though he initially spent a night locked in a cell with the prisoners, he reports in 1743 that he was kept outside in the yard. This small hindrance was easily dealt with, however, as Charles stood on a bench while the prisoners climbed up to their cell windows to hear him.[595] In January and February of the same year, Charles reported several instances in which he was refused entrance, despite having produced a sheriff's order. Though he typically found another keeper to let him in, he was particularly irritated by the situation, especially considering that the Catholic priest could come and go as he pleased.[596] This resistance to Methodist prison ministry extended to Cardiff, where some citizens tried to pass a

[594] A. Nowel to Charles Wesley, 25 August 1755, EMV 115 and Thomas Price to Charles Wesley, 25 August 1755, EMV 120.
[595] CWJ vol. 2, 14 January 1743, 338.
[596] Ibid., 338-340.

motion prohibiting Methodists from visiting the prison. The motion also included prosecution of any of the "stroling preachers," should they happen to be in the vicinity.[597]

What accounted for this opposition? The prisoners, having sped through the conversion process, by and large arrived at the same joyful state as other Methodists, seemingly soundly converted. Moreover, for the Methodist, the supposed guilt of the prisoner mirrored the natural, sinful condition of all. Thus, the conversion of a criminal provided a powerful visualization of the metaphorical language used for the ordinary Christian.[598] Local authorities, however, seemed much less interested in criminals attaining heavenly rewards than meting out earthly punishment. Whereas Joseph Carter had been criticized for causing his mother distress on her deathbed, Methodist leaders were criticized for precisely the opposite—for making criminals too happy.

In his memoirs, Bishop James Lackington complained about the dangerous effects of Methodist prison ministry upon society:

> I have often thought that great hurt has been done to Society by the Methodist preachers, both in town and country, attending condemned Malefactors, as by their fanatical conversion, visionary hymns, bold and impious applications of the scriptures, &c., many dreadful offenders against law and justice, have had their passions and imaginations so worked upon, that they have been sent to the other world in such raptures, as would better become martyrs innocently suffering in a glorious cause, than criminals of the first magnitude. … [Instead,] notorious offenders [are] encouraged to persevere, trusting sooner or later, to be honoured with a similar degree of notice, and thus by a kind of hocus pocus, be suddenly transformed into saints.

[597] A. Nowel to Charles Wesley, 25 August 1755, EMV 115.
[598] See Cruickshank, "Singing at the Scaffold," 138.

Lackington worried that the rapturous longing to fly into the arms of Jesus replaced the more appropriate "fearfull *looking for of* (future) *judgment*." Surely, he concluded, this was not the best method to "check the alarming progress of moral depravity."[599]

Lackington's fears played into the broader ideal of capital punishment serving as a crime deterrent and a mechanism for reinforcing ideological control and state authority.[600] As such, prisoners had a distinctive role to play in this public drama. In order for the death to serve as a warning, the felon would ideally offer a confession as part of his or her dying speech, perhaps exhorting the audience to avoid a similarly sad end. This kind of speech had been common since Tudor times. In the late seventeenth century, the Dutch minister Balthasar Bekker visited England, noting with surprise that "the convict resembled a minister on the pulpit… were it not for the rope around his neck."[601] In contrast, the glorious death of the evangelically converted malefactor seemed to have undermined this serious sense of contrition and drastically reduced the moralistic overtones. In the aforementioned Cardiff courtroom, Methodists were accused of "having declared that the poor guilty felon was in as good a state (if not better than any present) and that he would be an happy soul."[602] Whether or not the Methodists actually said this (and it is likely that they did), the convict in question did indeed manifest a "chearfull countenance" under the gallows. Instead of expounding upon his crimes and reinforcing the justice system, he gave a "very pathetick exhortation," declaring that the Methodists were the only godly people these days, and that "the occasion of his coming

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[599] Lackington, *Memoirs*, 271-273.
[600] Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*, 81.
[601] Balthasar Bekker ms., Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, *Handscriften* no. 131 G 29:46, quoted in Spierenburg, *Spectacle of Suffering*, 63.
[602] A. Nowel to Charles Wesley, 25 August 1755, EMV 115.

to that ignominious death was in leaveing them and going after sin." In closing, he offered his affirmation of faith: "I believe in Jesus Christ, and am sure I shall go to heaven."[603]

In her examination of Charles Wesley's hymns written for condemned malefactors, Joanna Cruickshank asserts that the individualistic emphasis of Methodist theology ("for *me*") also helped to undermine the "traditional emphasis on the body politic." "This broader community of body politic," she explains, "was more important than any individual body."[604] In their efforts to rescue the souls of individual malefactors, thereby transforming them into effective though short-lived evangelists, Methodists subverted the intended purpose of public executions. Such an exuberant exit rendered the felon a virtuous martyr with whom one sympathized rather than a notorious offender whose life and death served to benefit society as a warning.

The active role of Methodist preachers in the lives of prisoners may possibly have been seen as a threat to the established religious authorities already working in the prisons. It is clear that Methodists at times usurped the Ordinary's position by singing to drown him out, and that the prisoners mentioned in the narratives appeared to welcome the Methodist presence much more warmly than that of the Ordinary. Though Charles seems to have deferred to the Ordinary with regard to the sacrament, he had no qualms about assuming his place as an execution evangelist, speaking to both convicts and crowd. He complained at times about the Ordinary's "miserable" preaching, as well as his unfortunate habit of falling asleep during prayers. Charles also blamed the Ordinary

[603] Thomas Price to Charles Wesley, 25 August 1755, EMV 120.
[604] Cruickshank, "Singing at the Scaffold,"142-44.

for not having awakened the prisoners to their spiritual condition, lamenting that "that poor creature… is worse than no minister at all."[605]

At the same time, Methodists also upheld the authority of the legal system in that they rarely if ever advocated for a pardon. Gatrell has severely criticized the Methodists for this very reason, claiming that they "diminish[ed] the obligation to confront the dangers in the ramshackle process of law and the pain it so often implausibly inflicted."[606] Early Methodist correspondence also gives credence to this criticism. In 1748, Charles Wesley visited "a poor wretch" in Newgate who was sentenced to burning for counterfeiting money. He admitted that the proof was slim, but claimed that "her life and character cast her." Instead of contesting the dubious sentence, he upheld it based on her immoral lifestyle: "She has lived in all manner of wickedness, and narrowly escaped death before for killing her son-in-law. Justice has now overtaken her, and she cries she is lost forever." After several days of intense prayer and evangelization, the woman was converted with such tears as moved many other prisoners. Word then came that a pardon was expected. Instead of rejoicing that a sister in the faith would be spared for future usefulness and sharing of the gospel, Charles "feared it might stop the work of God in her." In visiting the woman again, he was "agreeably surprised to find her full of fear and trouble at the news." She too, it seems, was afraid that if spared, she should fall from God. Her previously-scheduled death, however, would have guaranteed mercy upon her soul. Though she evinced the "very comfortable signs" of assurance and confidence,

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[605] CWJ, vol. 2, 29 January 1743, 339.
[606] V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 380.

Charles pretended to "[take] no notice, till the work should prove itself." Apparently, the rapidly-acquired faith of the converted malefactor could not be trusted in the long-term. Happily for Charles, the woman's conversion bore fruit, as several other prisoners were inspired by her transformation. Even the executioner ("a Papist") was "half converted" and held her in the "most profound reverence," upon which Charles seized the occasion to give him several Methodist publications.[607]

Sharpe observes that at least in the seventeenth-century, the prisoner's dying confession was not limited to the particular crime at hand, but might also include the felon's "slide into degeneracy." In confessing a "whole catalogue of wrongdoing," the offender upheld the legitimacy of both secular and religious authority.[608] What is shocking in these Methodist accounts is that both leaders *and converted felons alike* upheld the justice of being punished for crimes they did not commit. The validity of the sentence mattered not, as their guilt extended far beyond the offense in question. In a rather twisted fashion, human legal process carried out divine justice. Charles recounted the experience of another malefactor, who, when asked if he would rather die or live, responded:

> 'Was I to be any longer in this world, I might sin again.' He also acknowledged that his punishment was just, not on account of the theft for which he was condemned, as to which he persisted in his innocence to the last, but for another offence of the same sort, which the justice of *man* had never taken hold of him. [609]

[607] CWJ vol. 2, 22 February – 5 March 1748, 522-25.
[608] J. A. Sharpe, "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, no. 107 (May 1985), 151, 156.
[609] CWJ, vol. 1, 12 September 1741, 332.

For the Methodists, there was nothing remotely unfair about this situation. Charles affirmed the fitness of the punishment, making his customary discourse to the crowd and expressed satisfaction that the felon showed not "the least sign of fear or trouble." He doubted not that the malefactor resided now with Christ in paradise. [610]

In a study of eighteenth-century trials, Dana Y. Rabin remarks that defendants tried to distinguish between the "true self" and the "displaced" or "destabilized self" in order to change the outcome of the trial.[611] In this way, aberrant behavior could be blamed on a compromised mental state, thereby acquitting the true self of the legal consequences. Inversely, Methodists appeared to have used the notion of all-pervasive guilt to justify displaced or aberrant punishment.

In 1783, the public executions at Tyburn were abolished and the gallows moved to Newgate. It seems that the public spectacle no longer fulfilled its purpose, especially the procession from Newgate, which "was often seen by the authorities as a march of undue triumph for the convict." Consequently, "He was acclaimed by the public rather than regarded as a warning. As this occurred frequently, it is understandable that the authorities concluded that the spectacle of punishment no longer served the purpose which, to their minds, it had always done in the past."[612] The increasingly commercialized and dramatized nature of the spectacle may have partially contributed to its downfall. Already, the published "last dying speech" supported the "mythic

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[610] Ibid.
[611] Dana Y. Rabin, "Searching for the Self in Eighteenth-Century English Criminal Trials, 1730-1800," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2003), 100.
[612] Spierenburg, *Spectacle of Suffering*, 196.

presentation of the malefactor."[613] The custom of using criminals' corpses for medical research also raised serious questions and provoked riots.[614] While it is highly plausible that the abolition of the public process would have happened without the added ingredient of Methodist evangelization, the sight of the ecstatic malefactor only contributed to the weakening of traditional understandings of the justice system, despite supporting the punishment itself.

A final example highlights a shift in emphasis in the dying speech. In 1771, an unnamed correspondent wrote to Charles Wesley of an execution in which the malefactors were "exceding chearfull," even "rather more chearfull then one would have wished them to have been." One felon even declared, "This is the happiest day I ever saw in my life." As a result, the spectators thought them "quite hardened," though the felons insisted that they simply could not help themselves. One felon named Cannon gave the traditional warning to several boys standing nearby: "Take care that you do not come this way also. Take warning by me." In his dying speech, however, he proceeded to give account of how he was initially thrown into prison for three months on a false accusation, which led to him meeting dubious characters under whose influence he committed the crime for which he would soon hang. The point of this discourse was not to encourage others to take warning from *him,* but to steer clear of emulating his initial accuser and to "beware of such persons as he is." Moreover, he wanted to be sure the spectators understood that he had forgiven the accuser "from the ground of [his] heart."[615]

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[613] Sen, "Hogarth, Egan, Dickens," 90.
[614] Devereaux, "Recasting the Theatre of Execution," 145.
[615] Anonymous to Charles Wesley, 1771, EMV 141.

Closing reflections

These accounts of death and dying recapitulate many of the themes identified in the conversion narratives. Once again, individuals were faced with the need to overcome spiritual obstacles, worldly cares and attachments, fears of judgment and damnation, and to find their voice as evangelist. As the final moments before death were considered to be definitive in terms of salvation, the longing for assurance of forgiveness became even more intense. For those as-yet-unconverted, the transformative process was accelerated (though not simplified), often being achieved in a matter of mere days. Whereas conversion narratives often included providential happenings that occurred in everyday life, dying persons were typically confined to the deathbed (or the prison, as it were). The stage was thus limited to the place of death or execution, and the actors restricted to those close acquaintances and relevant professionals invited to share in the intimate encounter. As with conversion, the journey toward death was not to be traveled alone. The narratives evince a powerful dynamic among the dying individuals, the spectators and the ministers, all of whom mutually encouraged and challenged one another. They drive home the importance of salvation for all, including persons of varying generations, life circumstances, social positions, educational abilities, genders and ethnicities. While the real-time event in itself often proved extremely moving and profitable for those present, the writing of the narrative allowed the experience to "animate" the souls of a wider audience. In life and in death, Methodists seldom lost an opportunity to seek Christ and to share their convictions with the world.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the spiritual experiences of early Methodist lay people through their own narratives detailing their conversion process as well as deathbed moments. In an attempt to represent the experience of a "people," this work necessarily examines the lives of individuals, revealing a more nuanced portrait of the early decades of Methodism from within.

As has been noted earlier, many scholars have categorized particular evangelical beliefs and behaviors as decidedly unenlightened and irrational. It would seem, however, that early Methodist spirituality comfortably situated itself within its "enlightened" context, though it did so in unexpected ways. For instance, Methodists adapted the conception of sensory perception, considering faith as a supplementary sense for apprehending spiritual realities (which were considered to be even more real than what could be apprehended through the physical senses). In addition, early Methodists employed new Enlightenment forms of self-expression, such as written autobiographical accounts. Their discomfort with the task indicates the degree to which it was a novelty for them and their contemporaries. The endeavor of writing about the self implicated early writer in the complexities of negotiating one's own subjectivity, which was very much in flux during the Enlightenment. In these ways, Methodism claimed its place as an active (though unlikely) participant in Enlightenment dialogue.

During this time period, many converts to Methodism were still rather unfamiliar with the movement. Those who had heard of it were often skeptical or even actively critical before experiencing conversion themselves. Their accounts offer glimpses into

their first impressions of Methodism and Methodists, as well as the manner in which their lives were affected by their participation in the movement. Throughout this examination of lay narratives, several themes have emerged.

Literacy and media

When scholars mention early Methodism's project of spiritual literacy, they are usually referring to the publishing efforts of John Wesley and perhaps to the poetic output of Charles Wesley. The sources employed in this study demonstrate another aspect of this project—namely Charles's efforts to encourage not simply the reading but indeed the *writing* of spiritual biography and autobiography. Unlike John, Charles did not collect exemplary specimens for the purposes of publication. Instead, he solicited accounts from ordinary people of varying literate abilities. The result is a rich assortment of narratives, each recounting individual endeavors to progress spiritually and to integrate into the culture of Methodism.

These narratives offer insight into lay experiences of hearing preaching, reading scripture, singing hymns, engaging with leaders, encountering the supernatural and negotiating public perception. In short, they reveal the tangible effects of the Methodist movement and not only its ideals. They also reveal the challenge of writing about the self. While one might imagine that laity—and women in particular—might have welcomed opportunities of self-expression with open arms, many were reticent to expose themselves on paper. Autobiographies of ordinary people were as yet scarce and considered highly presumptuous in most circles. For this reason among others, the early writers actually preferred being subject to an authority rather than claiming an

independent subjectivity. As has been demonstrated, lay people found ways of displacing author-ity in order to exercise a passive agency.

Body and feelings

At the same time, the typical pattern of spiritual progression moved individuals from passive receptors of supernatural messages to active participants and evangelists. This process necessitated the confrontation with and transcendence of the old self in order to be born into a new spiritual reality. As part of the metaphorical death to the old self, early Methodists came face to face with their sins and shortcomings, often visualized as the damned and diseased "vile self." They felt themselves exposed before God, before the eye of the preacher (which seemed to pierce their very hearts), and before their fellow lay people. Once the process of new birth way underway, however, Methodists often found their spiritual senses beginning to activate. Notably, the "eye of faith" permitted them to perceive spiritual sights and concepts, often leading them to remark that everything appeared as new.

As a sign of the spiritual senses awakening, the body sometimes overflowed or temporarily failed when inhabited by the divine. The loss of control was not troubling in itself, as it indicated that God was working through the flesh to transform the individual. What was troubling was when lay people were unable to generate these manifestations and feelings. Indeed, some found themselves distressed because they were not distressed enough. The idea of feelings as a means of knowing created difficulties for not a few lay people. The task of interpreting feelings was sometimes overwhelming, requiring the aid of others. The origin of supernatural voices and visions was similarly perplexing, as it

was not always clear if a particular message was emanating from God, the devil or the individual. For many writers, however, the eventual overflowing of joy and love remained in their memories as a high point of their spiritual journeys. Some were soon disappointed that these feelings did not last, longing for fresh manifestations even years later. While this work aims to respect the "reality" of individual experience, the struggle to fit one's experience into an established pattern complicates—but does not undermine—the notion of authenticity. Indeed, it reveals Methodism's own efforts to negotiate the tension between the universal ("all") and the particular ("me").

Death as spiritual experience

The approach of death also provided an occasion for spiritual edification, both for the dying individual and the surrounding spectators. At this point, many issues previously addressed in conjunction with the process of conversion resurface, often with renewed intensity. The fears of death and judgment, theoretically overcome during conversion, had the potential to thwart that individual's salvation at the last moment. For this reason, friends and family gathered around to test and encourage the dying in their final moments. The "good death" had the effect of inspiring others to holy living and dying, while a "bad death" served as a warning to consider seriously one's ultimate destination. During one's last days and moments, the body exhibited its final manifestations: visions, voices, out-of-body experiences, etc. Again, individuals struggled to negotiate their feelings—namely fear and grief—and to channel them into appropriate outlets. For these reasons among other, welcoming death served as the final challenge for the spiritual journey.

In the case of prisoners, death also served as a "just punishment," regardless of whether they actually committed the particular crime for which they were being hanged. Execution represented the punishment merited by all guilty sinners and was therefore exploited for its symbolic potential. The impending hangings provided special opportunities for dramatic conversions, the effects of which were only valid if the execution actually took place as planned. A pardon or prolongation introduced the risk of sinning again and of losing one's newfound salvation. Still, the nature of the death did not detract from the glorious exit of a child of God—indeed it greatly enhanced it, thereby undermining the serious warning to society that public executions were intended to effect.

Evangelical community

One of the most striking features of early Methodist spirituality is the kinship created among Methodists, even from a distance. Many early writers were already isolated due to difficult personal circumstances or having moved for work. Others found themselves suddenly isolated because of their association with Methodists. In most cases, they were seeking the companionship of likeminded individuals and the liberty to speak openly about their souls. For this reason, they greatly valued the relationships afforded them by society meetings, classes and bands, and personal correspondence. The narratives evince a close network of religious seekers mutually encouraging one another, constantly challenging one another with frank advice and friendly admonishments. Methodists relied on each other for support in navigating unfamiliar ideas and

experiences. This connectional community formed the core of the Methodist movement, nurturing the individual throughout life and into death.

Transatlantic continuity

Many of the themes explored here continued into later Methodist practice, in spite of the increasing institutionalization of the Methodist movement. Striking similarities may be found between early American Methodism and the early British writers. For instance, a report of a 1792 American quarterly meeting describes a scene that could have come directly from Charles Wesley's journal:

> In the time of preaching [the Lord] opened the windows of heaven and poured down blessings upon us. Sinners were struck as with hammer and fire, or like as if thunder flashes had smitten them. A general cry began, so that I was forced to stop preaching. I stood upon the stand and looked on, and saw them in every part of the congregation with streaming eyes, and groaning for mercy, while others were shouting praises to God for delivering grace.[616]

In his study of American quarterly and camp meetings, Russell Richey poses the question, "Why did Methodism adopt the camp meeting?"[617] While he does recognize a continuity among quarterly meetings, annual conference and camp meetings, he frames that continuity exclusively in terms of structural organization. Even a quick glance at early British narratives will reveal that the revival atmosphere was already undeniably present in the individual and group practices of the first Methodists, and that such practices lay at the heart of Methodism on both sides of the Atlantic.

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[616] George A. Phoebus, *Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America, Chiefly Drawn from the Diary, Letters, Manuscripts, Documents, and Original Tracts of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), 142.
[617] Russell Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 23.

In his study of early American Methodism, historian John Wigger notes that the "enthusiasm" and "supernaturalism" found in American Methodism drew on popular practices from both American and Europe. When noting British antecedents, however, he claims that enthusiastic behavior was confined to the "margins of society," particularly to such groups as the Primitive Methodists and the "Magic Methodists," which were "decidedly more enthusiastic than the Wesleyan parent body."[618] This study, however, demonstrates that the seeds of America's "boiling hot religion" were indeed sown at the outset of British Methodism, directly within communities guided by Charles and John Wesley. An examination of early British Methodist lay experience, then, affords scholars of the transatlantic revival a better understanding of the continuity between British and American spiritual practice.

[618] John Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 110-11.

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_____. "Drawn out in Love: Religious Experience, the Public Sphere, and Evangelical Lay Women's Writing in Eighteenth Century England." Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 2013.

Wood, Andy. *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

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BORN 1982, Wellington, Kansas

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Boston University – Boston, Massachusetts
Doctor of Philosophy in History of Christianity – 9/2008 – 5/2016

Yale University Divinity School – New Haven, Connecticut
Master of Divinity – 8/2004 – 5/2007

Emory University – Atlanta, Georgia
Bachelor of Arts with major in Music and minor in Religion – 8/2002 – 5/2004

Yale University – New Haven, Connecticut
Undergraduate studies – 8/2001 – 5/2002

Prague Conservatory – Prague, Czech Republic
Certificate in Flute Performance – 10/2000 – 6/2001

ECCLESIASTICAL EXPERIENCE

Eglise Evangélique Méthodiste – Lausanne, Switzerland
Pastor – 2/2015 – present

Wesley United Methodist Church – Worcester, Massachusetts
Director of Christian Formation and Discipleship – 7/2012 – 6/2013

First United Methodist Church – Hudson, Massachusetts
Deacon – 10/2009 – 6/2013

United Parish of Upton – Upton, Massachusetts
Deacon – 11/2008 – 7/2009

Faith United Methodist Church – North Haven, Connecticut
Deacon – 10/2007 – 6/2008

First and Summerfield United Methodist Church – New Haven, Connecticut
Campus Ministry Associate – 8/2006 – 5/2007
Music Ministry – 10/2005 – 5/2007

East Pearl Street United Methodist Church – New Haven, Connecticut
Supply Pastor – 7/2006 – 5/2007

Jesse Lee United Methodist Church – Easton, Connecticut
Seminarian Associate – 8/2005 – 5/2006

AWARDS AND HONORS

Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History
Visiting Fellowship – 2014-2015

Boston University
Graduate Research Abroad Fellowship – 2014
Scholarly Funds for Travel – 2014

The United Methodist Church
Dempster Scholarship – 2009-2011

The Hymn Society of the United States and Canada
Emerging Scholar Award – 2009

Yale Divinity School
Charles S. Mersick Prize – 2007
Jesse H. and Hugo A. Norenberg Prize – 2007

The General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church
Ness Award – Second Prize for the paper, "The Singable Mr. Wesley: German Hymns to Warm an English Heart" – 2007

The Hymn Society of the United States and Canada
Lovelace Scholar – 2006

First United Methodist Church of Wellington, Kansas
Helen Voran Scholarship – 2006

Yale Divinity School
Richard C. Stazesky Scholarship – 2005-2007

The Fund for Theological Education
Ministry Fellow – 2004-2005
Undergraduate Fellow – 2002

Emory University
Theta Alpha Kappa, a National Honor Society in the field of Religious Studies/Theology – 2004 Dean's List – Spring 2004, Fall 2003, Spring 2003

PUBLICATIONS

"Missiological Journals: A Checklist," with Jonathan Bonk, Wendy Jennings and Dwight P. Baker. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 37.1 (Jan. 2013): 42-49.

Review of *Music and the Wesleys*, editors Nicholas Temperley and Stephen Banfield. *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 63.3 (2012): 53.

"The *Foundery Collection*: An Examination of the First Methodist Tunebook," *The Hymn* 60.4 (2009): 32.

"On Congregational Song," *General Board of Discipleship Worship Website*, 2007, <http://www.gbod.org/resource/on-congregational-song>.

PAPERS PRESENTED AT CONFERENCES

"Compelled to Speak, Constrained to Keep Silent: Editing the Self in Early British Methodism, 1735-1765," *Spring Methodist Studies Seminar*, Oxford Brookes University – April 2015

"'I Was Forced to Lift My Eyes': Sight and the Self in Early British Methodism, 1735-1765," *Oxford Symposium on Religious Studies*, Oxford, UK – December 2014

"'Testing the Spirits': Communication and Authentication in Early Methodism," *American Society of Church History Annual Meeting*, Boston, MA – January 2011

"The *Foundery Collection*: An Examination of the First Methodist Tunebook," *The Hymn Society Annual Conference*, Northfield, MN – July 2009

"Of Juicy and Succulent Wounds: Body and Blood in Eighteenth Century Moravianism" *Bodies in Motion*, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI – March 2009

"Charles Wesley and the Secular City" *An Eighteenth-Century Evangelical for Today: A Tercentenary Celebration of the Life and Ministry of Charles Wesley*, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK – September 2007

SPECIAL LITURGICAL ENGAGEMENTS

Temple Emanuel – Berlin, Massachusetts
Guest speaker – March 9, 2012

St. Luke's Episcopal Church – Hudson, Massachusetts
Guest preacher – April 22, 2011 and August 14, 2011

National Council of Churches – New Orleans, Louisiana
Worked with Worship Subcommittee to design liturgy for centennial gathering – November, 2010

2010 Boston: The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity – Boston, MA
Designed and led worship for conference session – November, 2010

Trinity Lutheran Church – Worcester, Massachusetts
Represented United Methodist Deacons in a service celebrating full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church – April 11, 2010

The Chilmark Community Church – Chilmark, Massachusetts
Guest preacher – August 30, 2009

Berkeley Divinity School – New Haven, Connecticut
Guest preacher at worship service celebrating mutual Eucharistic sharing between the Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church – March 7, 2007

ADDITIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Ed Mascari Piano Studio – Hudson, Massachusetts
Piano faculty – 6/2010 – 6/2013

Studia Liturgica – Boston, Massachusetts
Assistant to the Editor – 7/2009 – 5/2013

Oxford Studies in World Christianity – New Haven, Connecticut
Project Manager – 10/2007 – 7/2008

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Moravian Archives – Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
Certificate in German Script – 2011

Boston University – Boston, Massachusetts
French reading examination passed – 2010
German reading examination passed – 2009

Yale Summer Language Institute – New Haven, Connecticut
Certificate of German Reading Proficiency – 2006